Chronic Absence in FCPS

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Section One: Problem Description

The problem in question is why the GPA averages in Fayette County Public Schools (FCPS) lower than many other counties in the state. This is an important problem as there are over 40,000 students in FCPS and therefore is one of the biggest districts in the state. These students need a proper education to have a chance at education succeeding in college or a higher quality of life. GPAs also matter to individual schools as their funding is dependent on GPA averages. This issue could also be framed as what are other counties doing to have a high average GPA in Kentucky. However, I chose to focus on Fayette County because targeting one county rather than the other 119 in the state is far more manageable to begin with. This problem affects the students in FCPS, and the issue is limited to the surrounding area as these students are likely to go into the workforce in the area. Moreover, the colleges in the area will be affected as they are the pipeline for FCPS students seeking further education. This issue of a low average GPA is not simplistic.

Fortunately, this issue is quantifiable as GPA is scored on a numerical score. But the reasons for why the average GPA changes are broad such as home issues, absences, poor quality teaching, lack of opportunity to change GPA, etc. In recent years, from 2019 to 2021, the average GPA score went up according to data from KY Stats (Tableau Report - High School Feedback Report). There is a way to increase the average GPA as seen in progress from previous years. In order to solve this issue and increase the average GPA, the needs assessment will focus on attendance and student feedback. These two metrics are important because attendance is the direct measurement of chronic absence, while student feedback on the program decides the future of the program. This data is trackable through KY Stats and data from the Kentucky Department of Education. It is very important to mention that in the 2021-2022 school year, the data may be skewed or untraditional due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Section Two: Stakeholders

The key stakeholders of this issue are the FCPS board, the FCPS students, the parents of FCPS students, and the teachers at FCPS. Groups such as KDE or other non-profits are invested, but simply don't have great power in these county programs. These groups don't all agree on the source of the issue as their perspectives and actions towards the issues are all different. Every stakeholder has their own opinions, even within their own circles. Each opinion, such as mental health being important or not being important, matters in these stakeholder circles. However, these stakeholders also differ in power and position. The FCPS board has the power to determine the education content that students receive, as well as funding. The teachers of FCPS have very specific and important power as they see the students the most and determine the GPAs of students. The parents of FCPS children have power in the individual children's lives. They help provide a good background for learning and can make sure the student is present and willing to learn. Lastly, the student has a lot of personal choice to make in whether or not they put the effort into learning and increasing their GPA. Every stakeholder in this issue would be willing to support my evaluation as there are only benefactors in this evaluation. Essentially this evaluation will be a win-win for any of the stakeholders in a perfect world. There will be people unhappy, but if the stakeholders work for the benefit of students there will be a solution.

Section Three: Methodology

For sections one and two, I attempted to get interviews with educators in the DPP (Department of Pupil Personnel); however, no one responded in time for this assessment. Fortunately, there is data regarding the absence rate via the Kentucky Department of Education. In the report created by KY Stats on high school feedback, it is important to mention that the.

Attendance was still tracked daily during COVID-19, but due to quarantines, many students received temporary remote instruction. In the data sets provided (Kentucky Stats), there are counts of total students participating in school, along with students who are chronically absent. Chronically absent is defined as students who have missed more than ten days of school. Below is a data table highlighting chronic absence and GPA averages by county in the 2020-2021 school year.

Chronic Absence and GPA Average by County

County	Chronic Absence Rate	GPA Average
Bourbon	0.245	2.880
Clark	0.264	3.040
Fayette	0.309	2.960
Harrison	0.212	2.970
Jessamine	0.210	2.900
Madison	0.269	3.130
Scott	0.325	3.050
Woodford	0.181	3.130

*Fg.1; https://kystats.ky.gov/Latest/HSFR 2021-2022

I chose these two metrics for my collection because students need to be in the classroom to learn, which we expect would lead to higher average GPAs. I correlated the chronic absence data to the average GPA to see if the chronic absence rate influenced GPAs. Moreover, I chose the GPA rate over the ACT rate since it is an average of student performance rather than a one-time exam, such as the ACT. Furthermore, for GPA to go up, students need to be in the classroom to raise their GPA as it is an everyday metric. If I had more resources, I would look into the home life of students at a large scale, the education quality of the schools, the average income of students who miss school compared to those who don't, and I would look into the average amount of assignments a student received per class in a school district. All of these metrics would further explain discrepancies, such as why Scott County has a higher GPA average but a higher chronic absence rate.

Section Four: Results

Based on my research, I found that GPA rates may be correlated to chronic absence rates. There were certain unexpected findings, such as Scott County having a higher average GPA and chronic absence rate than Fayette County. To explore further, I recommend looking at further data, such as spending rate per student or assignment count averages per student in each district. This research will affect my program theory assessment by highlighting what data correlates to what metric, as well as the stakeholder's roles. Stakeholders' roles in GPA rates being affected by chronic absence rates are crucial, as each stakeholder highlighted above will play a specific role that no other can have, such as a parent taking their student to school. I can communicate this to the stakeholders by completing more research. When wanting more data for chronic absence rates affecting GPAs, stakeholders such as teachers or parents will need to be asked for more info on topics such as assignments and home life. These stakeholders will be engaged in the research and results of this program theory. In conclusion, there is much more to look at when comparing chronic absences to GPA rates, with the stakeholders being involved more in the research as well as more metrics to be considered to prove whether chronic absences affect GPA rates.

Section Five: Chronic Absence Needs Assessment

Chronic absence is defined as missing 10% of school days in an academic year according to the U.S. Department of Education. Missing school has had a direct effect on GPAs and the growth of learning concepts, according to Chris Young at FCPS. Being present in class and having a good GPA is crucial for employers, colleges, and personal growth. Presence in class leads to better conceptualization in the long term, which is ideal for employers, colleges, and personal goals.

Chronic absence has many stakeholders including parents, students, teachers, the FCPS board, KDE (Kentucky Department of Education), and the U.S. Department of Education. However, the stakeholders that will benefit the most from an evaluation would be parents, students, teachers, and FCPS board members. Parents would get the chance to see how their actions affect their children's actions.
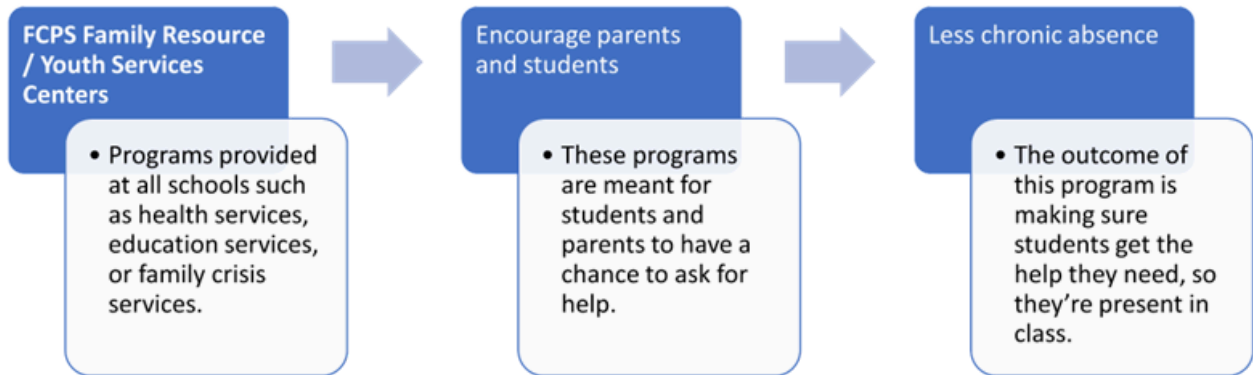
According to the assistant director of pupil personnel at FCPS, Chris Young, it is very important at a young age for students to attend class. If parents can get the opportunity to see how their actions reflect on their student's attendance records with an evaluation, it can potentially change the actions of parents. As a student, an evaluation can have different effects. An evaluation can show how the school system in Fayette County tracks and places students. In my interview with Chris Young, we spoke about how testing places students, but most importantly good learning and attendance habits really determine how students do in school. Students can get the opportunity to see how developmental grades such as K-3rd grades affect their further schooling, and just how important it is to show up to class.

With regard to teachers, an evaluation can help provide answers to why their students aren't attending class, and why students have low grades. Chris Young spoke about how teachers can only have so much effect without knowing the source of issues. Chronic absence occurs due to home issues, transportation issues, attitude issues, psychological issues such as anxiety, and many more.

With an evaluation, teachers in Fayette County schools can get the chance to see what issues are affecting their students and can look to find a proper solution. Lastly, FCPS board
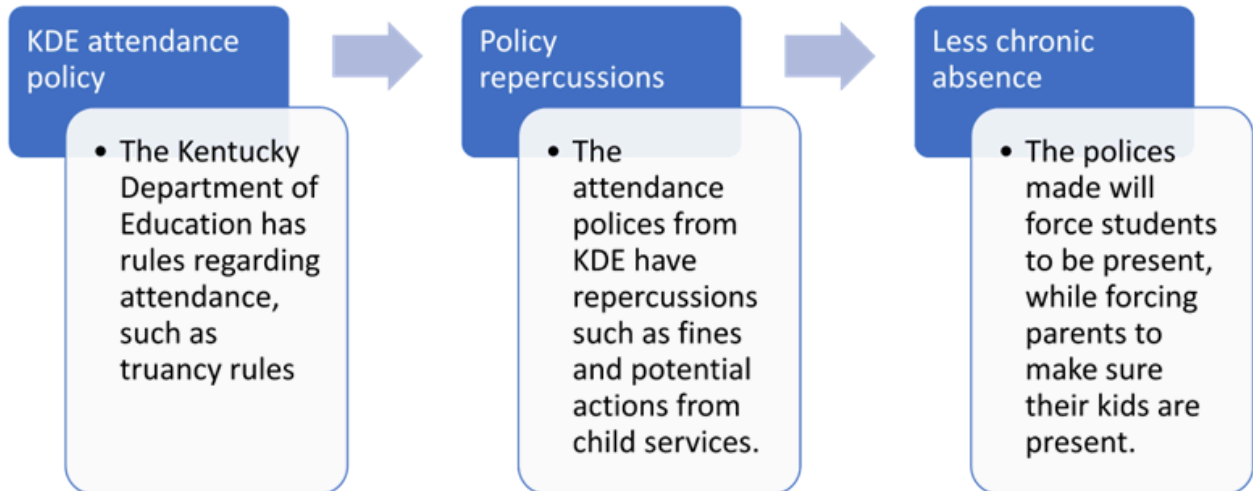
members can take the broad data from an evaluation and apply it to all the schools in the district. Chris Young spoke about the current outreach programs and how individual schools can help. With an evaluation, FCPS board members can take the broad data and create more effective programs. Regarding current outreach programs and policies, this leads to the next step of this evaluation. What programs and policies are in place now, what are the intermediate outcomes, and what are the eventual or desired impacts on chronic absence and GPAs?

       Education policy is handled by many actors such as the local government, federal government, local school board, state government, etc. There are three different policies designed to tackle chronic absence. The first policy is one created by the FCPS school board. The FCPS offers family resource/youth service centers. These policies provide families with healthcare resources, food sources, transportation services, counseling, etc. (Melton, 2023, fig. 2). The second policy is the state-level KDE attendance policy. This policy is more broad scale, as it is run by the state government. The attendance policy has regulations regarding chronic absences, which have punishments such as fines, social service action, or suspension (Kentucky Department of Education, 2023, fig. 3). The last policy I chose was the federal level, a policy by the U.S. Department of Education. Their policy is to collect data from schools while having limitations on metrics such as absence rates. If schools fail to provide info or go over their limits, they won't receive funding (United States Department of Education, 2023, fig. 4). Of the three policies I chose, the most plausible one to address chronic absence in Fayette County, the FCPS policy. This policy is the best to examine due to the locality of the program, the access to data, and the immediate impact this policy can have.

Section Six: Figures

FCPS Family Resource / Youth Services Centers	→	Encourage parents and students	→	Less chronic absence
• Programs provided at all schools such as health services, education services, or family crisis services.		• These programs are meant for students and parents to have a chance to ask for help.		• The outcome of this program is making sure students get the help they need, so they're present in class.

*Fg.2; https://www.fcps.net/leaders-support/departments-offices/student-support-services/extended-school-services

KDE attendance policy	→	Policy repercussions	→	Less chronic absence
• The Kentucky Department of Education has rules regarding attendance, such as truancy rules		• The attendance polices from KDE have repercussions such as fines and potential actions from child services.		• The polices made will force students to be present, while forcing parents to make sure their kids are present.

*Fg.3; https://www.fcps.net/leaders-support/departments-offices/student-support-services/extended-school-services

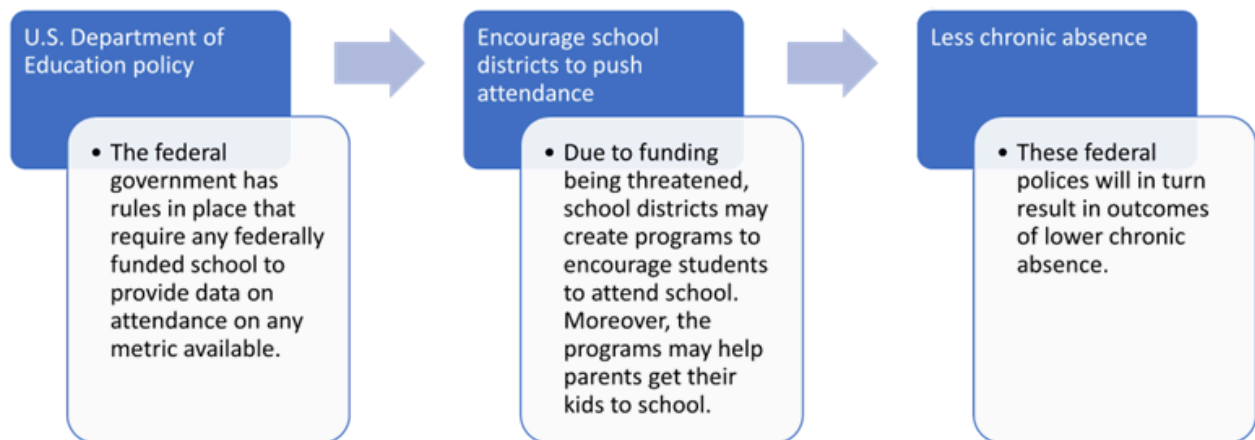| U.S. Department of Education policy		Encourage school districts to push attendance		Less chronic absence
	• The federal government has rules in place that require any federally funded school to provide data on attendance on any metric available.		• Due to funding being threatened, school districts may create programs to encourage students to attend school. Moreover, the programs may help parents get their kids to school.	• These federal polices will in turn result in outcomes of lower chronic absence.

*Fg.4; https://www.fcps.net/leaders-support/departments-offices/student-support-services/extended-school-services

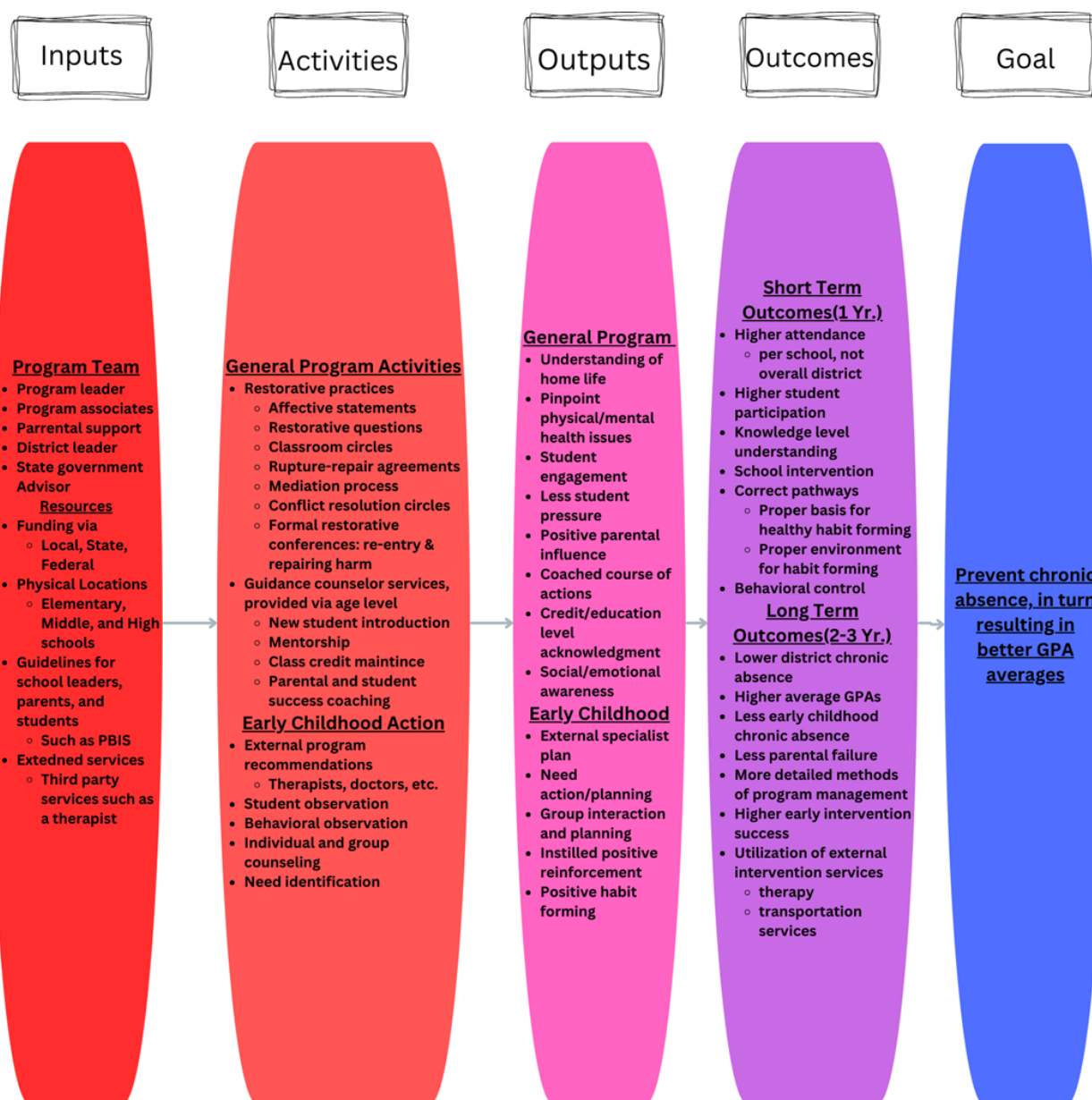   The policy I chose to explore was the FCPS family resource/youth services centers (FCPS, 2023d, fig. 5). This is a county-level policy, and after further investigation has the most direct impact on the target stakeholders. While there are many more aspects of this program, I focused on broad-scale program features, as well as at-risk stakeholders, i.e., young children. Children are the most at-risk group because the period between K-3rd grade is the most developmental age for habit forming, according to Chris Young in an interview from FCPS.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Goal

Program Team
- Program leader
- Program associates
- Parrental support
- District leader
- State government Advisor
    Resources
- Funding via
    - Local, State, Federal
- Physical Locations
    - Elementary, Middle, and High schools
- Guidelines for school leaders, parents, and students
    - Such as PBIS
- Extended services
    - Third party services such as a therapist

General Program Activities
- Restorative practices
    - Affective statements
    - Restorative questions
    - Classroom circles
    - Rupture-repair agreements
    - Mediation process
    - Conflict resolution circles
    - Formal restorative conferences: re-entry & repairing harm
- Guidance counselor services, provided via age level
    - New student introduction
    - Mentorship
    - Class credit maintince
    - Parental and student success coaching

Early Childhood Action
- External program recommendations
    - Therapists, doctors, etc.
- Student observation
- Behavioral observation
- Individual and group counseling
- Need identification

General Program
- Understanding of home life
- Pinpoint physical/mental health issues
- Student engagement
- Less student pressure
- Positive parental influence
- Coached course of actions
- Credit/education level acknowledgment
- Social/emotional awareness

Early Childhood
- External specialist plan
- Need action/planning
- Group interaction and planning
- Instilled positive reinforcement
- Positive habit forming

Short Term Outcomes(1 Yr.)
- Higher attendance
    - per school, not overall district
- Higher student participation
- Knowledge level understanding
- School intervention
- Correct pathways
    - Proper basis for healthy habit forming
    - Proper environment for habit forming
- Behavioral control

Long Term Outcomes(2-3 Yr.)
- Lower district chronic absence
- Higher average GPAs
- Less early childhood chronic absence
- Less parental failure
- More detailed methods of program management
- Higher early intervention success
- Utilization of external intervention services
    - therapy
    - transportation services

Prevent chronic absence, in turn resulting in better GPA averages

*Fg.5; https://www.fcps.net/leaders-support/departments-offices/student-support-services/extended-school-services

Section Seven: Inputs, Activities, & Outputs

Fayette County Public Schools(FCPS) student support services range from a broad swath of programs such as therapy, third-party resource recommendations, home visits, partnerships with medical services, etc. However, the basics of how each program starts, and their goals, tend to be similar. The basic input of all programs provided is contact and situation identification. Educators and support staff first contact students and parents. This approach is very specific and tedious. Situations arise such as lack of power, phone access, improper housing, etc. Once contact is made, keeping the title "school social worker" quiet is crucial due to the stigma of social workers. This is the first failure that can happen, as communication can be difficult or

impossible if the right steps aren't taken. Once communication is established, understanding the situation of a family is the next step. This can be tricky as well due to a lack of data, such as budgetary info or income info.

Moreover, if a child is younger it can be harder for a child to express the situation they are in. Raine Minichan, the associate director of student support services at FCPS, made it clear that situations of families are crucial for programs to take effect. Once the family situation is known, this is where activities can start to happen. What happens is based on the situation of the family, the age of the child, accessibility to the resource(s), and the willingness to engage.

A common situation, as explained by Raine Minichan, is generational poverty. Generational poverty is very hard to provide services to, and even harder to stop the cycle. FCPS provides a range of effective services to these families however, these include transportation to services, enrollment in social programs providing income, community partnerships providing a range of services, in-home visits, in-school medical services, etc. These services can help bridge the gap that plagues families in poverty needing assistance.

Once a service is chosen to be used, support staff, educators, or third-party staff administer the activities. This leads to outputs, the goal being more student attendance, better student well-being, and a better chance to succeed in life. Once a student is in a program and gets the benefits of the program, the ideal result will be the family showing support for their student, and the student being present in school. Generally, the goals are the same, but due to the many possible situations, the outputs can change. A student in poverty will have an output of coming to class and getting financial resources whereas a student with mental health issues, the output will be better mental health and presence in class.

Section Eight: Dose delivery, satisfaction, service utilization, and recruitment

Students in need of support will vary in their needs. The delivery of resources will change with the needs of a student and their family. Raine Minichan spoke to me regarding the best methods of program implementation. She said that home visits were the most effective. These home visits can provide a sense of the situation and create relationships for better direct delivery of program services. Another method of delivery of programs is the use of partnered city services. Raine Minichan mentioned that third-party city social services are partnered with FCPS, and via the recommendation from FCPS families can get benefits, such as cash assistance. This method of delivery is more prevalent post COVID-19, Raine mentioned. She noted that rent payments being stopped during the pandemic, and accumulated to be paid once payments were required again resulted in many low-income families needing more support.

With the numerous support services provided, the delivery method will vary. However, the most common method is in-person interaction and implementation. Once these programs are delivered, there are negative and positive reactions. I spoke to Raine about when program participants receive resources, and how they react. She said most recipients tend to act positively, and it can take time to show success. However, Raine also spoke on when participants are not satisfied with the resources given. For example, if a parent or student has a negative in-school experience the bias of the participant will drastically affect the satisfaction they feel from a program.

This is another point of failure when satisfaction levels are low for participants. This failure rarely happens, but when it does this can result in students having a back track in progress. When students or parents are not satisfied with the resources given, for whatever reason, it can result in reinforcement of negative bias towards the school system and the student

may be less present in classes. Similar to satisfaction of student support services is the service utilization. Certain services are underused or not used at all due to recipient satisfaction or bias.

One mentioned by Raine was the youth support centers. These locations tend to be underused due to the stigma of these centers. This service, the physical location of the centers, is the most underutilized. Lastly in the recruitment of program staff and recipients. Program staff are recruited with certain personality traits and general knowledge wanted. Raine explained that workers chosen by FCPS for these services need to be calm, create ease in a conversation, be knowledgeable of the FCPS system, understand the community, and be open to learning more about the system, students, and community. With regard to recipient recruitment, recipients can sign up for programs that they are eligible for. Recipients can also be chosen by FCPS to be given information, phone calls, or home visits. The choice of recipients depends on the situation the recipient is in. FCPS also offers a help portal for students or parents to sign up for programs via a request, making the recruitment of participants transparent and efficient.

Section Nine: Barriers of Implementation

Public schools are known to have many political barriers, which tend to result in operational barriers. The most common barrier of a policy for FCPS is lack of funding. This is due to the political stigma around public school funding. Raine specifically mentioned that mental health funding is lacking, which is due to political actions. Many local decisions deciding on funding have downplayed mental health funding as "woke" and won't give the funding. This political barrier results in operational barriers for such programs providing mental health resources. Furthermore, the use of partnered program resources is limited as well. As mentioned above the rent build-up from Covid-19 is a broadening issue as programs to help pay the debts are limited, and FCPS can only recommend so many families. These barriers of implementation create failures in the program. The simple answer is giving FCPS more funding to provide more efficient programs and to have more slots for participants. In reality, the most important aspect is changing the stigma behind mental health, and the funding for mental health programs. This political barrier is found at all levels of government, and even at the FCPS school board level.

Section Ten: Treatment

The treatment for chronic absence is providing students with support services, which ideally will lead to better GPA scores. These include mental health clinics, tutoring centers, home visits, financial aid, counseling, and many more. This treatment is both endogenous and exogenous. The treatment provided can either be requested by a student, or their parents. Services can also be given and chosen by the schools and FCPS. Therefore, depending on the situation, the treatment can both be endogenous and exogenous. The counterfactual of this treatment is if a student, or their family, never received support services from FCPS. This is the direct opposite of treatment, and will be a result directly lacking the treatment's effects.

Section Eleven: Analysis

In regards to measuring the program effect, the unit of measurement and outcome variable are generally quantifiable. The first quantifiable unit of measurement is absence rates. There is numerical data on days present or absent on a student's record. The next unit of measurement are GPA's for students who received treatment. This is also data collected numerically over time. The GPA and chronic absence rates are also the outcome variables, depicting whether treatment had an effect on recipients. The last measurement of success is not quantifiable, but rather the opinions of the recipients. A survey would be ideal to gauge the effectiveness on an emotional level, as well as ease of access or any other point where numbers cannot apply.

Section Twelve: Research Design

With the section above depicting the measurements required to show effectiveness, the actual design of the research is the next step. For measuring GPA and chronic absence rates, a DID design would work well for both sets of measurements. There would be students A and B, and each student would have chronic absence. The more complex issue is determining the length of time required for the program effects to intervene. After interviewing Raine and Chris from FCPS, they suggested a time frame anywhere between 3-6 months in most cases. Therefore the best time measurement for the DID model would be to analyze the effects in a six month period after the recipients have or have not gotten treatment.

Once the data is acquired and put into a DID model, the next step would be taking the after effects of each student and subtracting the outcomes to find the benefit of the program. This style of model is reasonable due to the affordability and simplicity of the model. This model can be used for both numerical measurements, without each model being altered. The survey data will be collected as is, and looked at individually. There will be a set of questions rating certain attributes of the program, with sections for recipients to explain their answers. This is also a simplistic and effective way of determining program effect with qualitative data. This program effect estimate will be different based on how the treatment is started. If FCPS gives treatment out, it will be ITT as the treatment is being offered but not forced. Whereas if a student/parent reaches out to FCPS for support services, the treatment effect estimate will be ATE. This is because parents/students who request support will receive it, and the parents/students who don't request support will not receive it. These two estimates are both situational, in my interviews with Chris and Raine they said that most of the time the school will reach out first. Therefore the most reasonable and likely estimate will be ITT.

Section Thirteen: Research Design Bias

There will always be sources of bias in education. In my research method, and estimation method, the biases apply to both. First, the bias that school isn't important. A common reason for chronic absence is from parents instilling the idea that school is unimportant. This will lead to lack of acceptance for support services from FCPS. Furthermore, the bias of mental health is an outlier. This bias is the most common to prevent program effectiveness, according to my interview with Raine. Bias of mental health support will lead to less program effectiveness and utilization. This bias will also lead to less funding for program services being taken away, as mental health won't be seen as an issue needed to be targeted. Another bias will be students/parents receiving outside treatment, such as a tutor. This can affect the GPA data, as students are receiving support outside of the program effect. Lastly, another point of bias will be the stigma behind social workers. Home visits are another largely successful part of support services, and are generally done by FCPS social workers. The stigma of social workers may cause parents/students to deny entrance into their homes. This leads to a lack of program treatment, or effectiveness. In order to address these issues stigmas must change, this will be a difficult task, but can start with promotional ads and announcements. The concept that school is important must be changed at the parental level. This could be changed by informative media showing the importance of school. This bias is another one that is very difficult to change. Lastly, outside effect bias such as tutors will never be possible to change. The important part of this bias is to make sure when data is collected, there is a subcategory or an asterisk showing that there was outside help to boost GPA.

Section Fourteen: Conclusion

Chronic absence in FCPS schools will always be prevalent and it is imperative that educators work towards creating more preventative methods. The support service programs that FCPS offers provide a great deal towards curbing chronic absence. Mental health stigma along with parental actions affect student attendance the most. With the Covid-19 pandemic, the challenge of chronic absence was increased. Students show progress with GPA growth, and if students aren't in the classroom learning there won't be growth. The solution to chronic absence is very complicated and situational. Whether a child is without electricity, or the parents don't take their child to school, each situation is different. I have learned over this project that education policy is difficult to change. I've also learned that the people at FCPS are truly putting all efforts into their work, and I applaud them for all of their support.

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