EFFECTIVE TRUANCY REDUCTION PROGRAMS:

HOW IS SUCCESS DEFINED?

by

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ABSTRACT

EFFECTIVE TRUANCY REDUCTION PROGRAMS: HOW IS SUCCESS

DEFINED?

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This research examines how stakeholders involved with the Dallas County

Truancy Court define the success of truancy reduction programs. Previous studies have

failed to include the perceptions of all major stakeholders and examine the process of

meaning making. Judges, non-profit organizations, parents, and principals from the six

districts serviced within the Dallas County Truancy Court were interviewed to assess

how success was measured within truancy reduction programs. Findings indicate that

the measure of success among stakeholders was not consistent. This study identified the

factors that influenced meaning making and the barriers associated with developing a

uniform definition of success among multiple stakeholders in a decentralized

arrangement.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Truancy is an issue that impacts society economically and socially as students leave school lacking the skills and knowledge needed to flourish in an information-based society that demands higher education (Bye, Alvarez, Haynes, & Sweigart, 2010). The United States Department of Education reports that at least 7.5 million students miss a month of school annually (Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Students' absences result in 135 million days of lost instructional time in the classroom (Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Many truancy reduction programs focus on bringing students back into the classroom but may not target the underlying conditions that lead students to become truant and as a result the design of truancy programs varies widely (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001). Some programs aim to provide counseling to chronically truant student but few offer academic support and it is this combination of social and academic support that may provide the right mix of resources to improve the success of chronically truant students (Bell, Rosen, & Dynlacht, 1994). A central question to determining the efficacy of truancy reduction programs is the program's definition of success, is success simply returning the student to the classroom? No occurrences of truancy episodes? Preventing the child from entering the juvenile court

system? The literature on truancy is unclear about this point. The goal of this research is to use the framework provided by the theory of social construction to determine if the term "success" is a shared construct among stakeholders involved with truancy reduction programs. If varying definitions of success exist among stakeholders, then identifying these definitions is important.

Truancy is associated with increased levels of delinquency and an increased reliance on social welfare programs (Baker, Sigmon, Nugent, 2001). It has a negative impact on taxpayers, businesses, and school districts as taxpayers bear the financial burden for uneducated, unemployed individuals through social programs such as welfare. Businesses lack an educated workforce and must provide training for employees. School districts run the risk of losing state and federal funding based on their student attendance records (Garry, 1996).

The United State government has encouraged the development and expansion of comprehensive truancy reduction programs by offering grants through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJPD), Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools (SDFS), and the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program (2008). The major goal of the U.S. government is to decrease the occurrence of truancy and in turn decrease the rate of incarceration and crime and increase future employability among youth. The United States Department of Education is seeking the development of programs that include partnerships between educators, the justice system, social

services, law enforcement, parents, and community resources (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2008). State governments develop clear, specific procedures and guidelines for handling truant students. For example, the Texas Education Code requires that districts use some type of truancy prevention strategy before filing a case against a truant student. Local governments are most concerned with the enforcement of the law through the court system (Mueller, Giacomazzi, & Stoddard, 2006). The data collected for this study focuses on the Dallas County Truancy Court. The court has recently recieved media attention for its procedures used to deal with truants.

The effectiveness and the legality of the procedures used by the Dallas County Truancy Court are being challenged by three advocacy groups: Texas Appleseed, National Center for Youth Law, and Disability Rights Texas (Ayala, Hallman, Leszcynski, & Weiss, 2013). The complaint filed by the three advocacy groups on behalf of eight Dallas County students specifically denunciates the Dallas County Truancy Court's criminal prosecution of truancy and claims that the practices used are "grossly disproportionate to the offending behavior… students are coerced and cajoled into pleading guilty, are given substantial fines and must deal with inflexible attendance policies" (Ayala, Hallman, Leszcynski, & Weiss, 2013, p.2A). Texas Appleseed is a non-profit organization that promotes social and economic justice for all Texans; however, the focus is on those more susceptible to the consequences of systematic

injustices such as children, immigrants, refugees, and individuals with mental

disabilities. With the help of volunteer lawyers, Texas Appleseed is able to ensure that

school discipline procedures do not fuel the school-to-prison pipeline and/or dropout

rates (Texas Appleseed, 2013). Similar to Texas Appleseed, the National Center for

Youth Law focuses on a segment of the population exposed to systematic injustices,

low-income children. Low-income children are provided with the resources, life-skills,

and guidance that they need to be successful in present and future educational settings

and to make productive contributions to society (National Center for Youth Law, 2013).

Disability Rights Texas ensures that Texans with disabilities are educated about their

rights and afforded equal participation within society (Disability Rights Texas, 2013).

The advocacy groups contend that the current attendance policies and tracking systems

do not account for legitimate excuses or for individual personal situations. Dallas

County Judge Clay Jenkins addresses the claims of the opponents of the Dallas County

Truancy Court and attributes Dallas County's high number of truancy cases to the

widely held belief that we must hold students and parents accountable. Jenkins states

that his "focus is not on making the truancy court system a perfect or pleasant

experience…[but,] to make it an effective experience so kids go back to school and

graduate" (Ayala, Hallman, Leszcynski, & Weiss, 2013, p. 2A).

　　　The coherence between these different goals for truancy programs is unclear,

particularly as one examines the focus of truancy programs for schools, courts, counties,

and various federal initiatives. The main questions that this research seeks to address are: 1) What are the challenges faced in defining success when multiple organizations with multiple stakeholders are involved in a decentralized arrangement? 2) How is success of a truancy reduction program defined by school districts, school principals, parents, and judges? 3) Is the definition of success used by schools, districts, and the state the same as the definition of success used by key stakeholders and nonprofit organizations that work with truant students?

Purpose of the Study

Previous research on truancy focused on the reasons why truancy occurred (i.e. individual factors, family factors, and school factors) (Dustmann, Rajah, & Smith, 1997; Reid & Kendall, 1982; Sommer, 1985; Sommer & Nagel, 1991). Current research regarding truancy is concentrated on preventing the occurrence of truancy through different models of truancy reduction programs (Bazemore, Stinchcomb, & Leip, 2004; Byer & Kuhn, 2003; Dembo & Gulledge, 2009; Fantuzzo, Grim, & Hazan, 2005; Huck, 2011). The purpose of this research is to determine if all stakeholders engaged with truants hold the same definition of success. It is important to examine stakeholders' definitions of success in relation to truancy reduction programs because it may aid in determining how and why truancy reduction programs are effective. To meet this purpose, this research will explore how key stakeholders involved with the Dallas County Truancy Court define the success of truancy reduction programs. The definition

of success has the potential to directly impact student outcomes. If success is not defined the same among stakeholders, the baseline used for measuring student improvement will differ. Also, the way in which success is defined will influence how goals of truancy reduction programs are formulated and the elements included in the program. A common definition of success among stakeholders will also aid in the use of best practices and research across districts.

<div align="center">Significance of the Study</div>

Currently, few studies have focused on the perceptions of stakeholders within truancy reduction programs and those that do lack generalizability and fail to include the perspectives of all of the major stakeholders such as parents, administrators, judges, and coordinators for non-profit organizations and agencies (Robinson, 2009; McDonald, 2009; Sherman, 2012). The perceptions of the stakeholders involved with any truancy reduction program are vital because they are at the frontline implementing or reinforcing the program, and the stakeholders' perceptions of the various components and the efficacy of the programs have the ability to impact student success (Robinson, 2009; McDonald, 2009; Sherman, 2012). This study seeks to identify and examine how key stakeholders involved with the Dallas County Truancy Court define the success of truancy reduction programs. In addition, this study seeks to use the theory of social construction to understand the process of meaning making among the major

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stakeholders affiliated with the Dallas County Truancy Court: judges, parents, non-profit administrators, and principals.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The research literature reviewed in this chapter focuses on exploring the

rationale of compulsory education and educational reform and legislation, defining

truancy, identifying the common characteristics among truants, and exploring how the

theory of social construction can be used to understand the process of meaning making

within the Dallas County Truancy Court. Questions that the research literature reviewed

seeks to explore are: 1) How does the theory of social construction contribute to

understanding stakeholders' definition of success in relation to truancy reduction

programs? 2) How does the inconsistent definition of truancy across states and school

districts impact the measurement of success of a truancy reduction program?

Social Constructions

This research project will explore the term "success" within the context of

public education in the United States. It is theorized that the definition of "success" is a

social construct that has been legitimized by educational reform and legislation and

subsequently been transmitted back into the educational system through key

stakeholders such as judges, principals, non-profit organizations, and parents through

the processes of socialization and symbolic interactionism. Socialization refers to

individuals' acquisition of the rules and norms appropriate for specific social settings

(Parsons, 1951, 1955). Socialization primarily takes place through fundamental

institutions such as school, church, and family. Within the process of socialization, symbolic interactionism occurs which is the idea that humans develop meaning through interactions (Blumer, 1969). In other words, individuals act a certain way towards people and objects based on the meanings that have been ascribed to them through the process of socialization (Blumer, 1969). Once meaning has been ascribed to people or objects, language is a means by which individuals can negotiate and define or redefine these meanings. But Blumer (1969) argued that these meanings are not static, but that – individuals can reflect, assess and change their interpretations of the meaning of people and objects for a clearer understanding (Blumer, 1969).

While the concepts of socialization and symbolic interactionism are key concepts within the theory of social construction, there are other elements of the theory that must be examined to truly understand the development of constructs such as "success". The theory of social construction has become increasingly popular as researchers strive to investigate how and why certain meanings are ascribed to certain terms or objects. According to Crossley (2004), a social construct "means that we believe the phenomenon in question to be a product of our particular society or societies like it, rather than being something which is natural or inevitable, hard-wired into our biological constitution and invariant" (Crossely, 2004, p.296-97). In other words, the theory of social constructionism asserts that individuals and societies create their own realities based on their interactions with others. The theory of social construction is not

only concerned with the meaning but also with the processes that create those meanings (Crossley, 2004). The theory of social construction is complex so in an effort to be explicit about what the theory encompasses, it is necessary to explore the philosophical foundations of the theory of social construction, identify how previous research has used the theory to explain social phenomenon, and establish how the theory of social constructionism is relevant and will be utilized in the current study.

Philosophical Foundations of the Theory of Social Construction

Research within the social sciences has evolved through four different traditions: philosophical foundationalism, conflict theory that evolved into critical theory, hermeneutic, and social construction (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). Having n understanding of this evolutionary process within the social sciences provides a clearer understanding of the theory of social construction. Philosophical foundationalism is seen as the "antithesis" of the theory of social construction. The tradition of philosophical foundationalism seeks to establish the rules and conditions under which valid knowledge can be produced. According to philosophical foundationalists, all legitimate knowledge must be scientifically and logically certain based on specific universal principles (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). While the tradition of philosophical foundationalism staunchly adhered to scientific principles, the theory failed to account for sociohistorical and other contextual factors that inevitably impact social research, but is still alive under new names such as positivism, empiricism, and reliabilisim.

While positivists, empiricists, and reliabilists resolutely adhere to scientific doctrines, there is a faction of social researchers who believe that "not only is the quest to discover universal truths less useful than research that explores how we come by, now use, and/or might transcend our current conceptual orientations, but the quest to discover universal truths can also be downright harmful, because it encourages us to think fatalistically about the status quo and to naturalize aspects of our existence that are not inevitable and that ought to be challenged and changed" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008, p. 15).

Philosophical foundationalism largely ignored the contextual factors that contributed to the formation of the so-called universal truths and definitions within the natural sciences so conflict theory was introduced by Karl Marx to challenge individuals to understand the social class structure. Karl Marx, a German philosopher, believed that the dominant order of society, whether it be economic, political, or ideological, was based on the concept of capitalism. Marx delineated between two major groups in society: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The means of production controlled the institutions and values within society; therefore, the working class or the proletariat were oppressed by the individuals in power, the bourgeoisie (Marx & Engels, 1888). In addition to controlling the profit that drives production, the bourgeoisie were able to permeate institutions and define values and norms within society. According to Marx, in order to challenge the existing structure and seek change, the proletariat would

have to acknowledge their shared experiences of oppression and contest the assumed

structure of society. He termed this idea "class consciousness (Marx & Engels, 1888)."

Critical theorists built on the shortcomings of conflict theory to further explore

the many ways that structure influences individuals as they define certain symbols,

ideas, and/or objects. This idea is very evident within the theory of social

constructionism. Critical theory recognizes the presence of a distinct class structure

within capitalistic societies but goes beyond this recognition by trying to understand the

persistence of capitalism and the lack of class consciousness that could lead to societal

change (Marx & Engels, 1888; Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). One critical theorist that

worked to dissect the process of "universal truths" was Bourdieu (1989). Bourdieu

focused on the concepts of domination, socialization, and capital. Like Marx, Bourdieu

acknowledged the powerful group's control over the resources. Individuals who were

not in the dominate class accepted the social arrangements as legitimate and did not

challenge the practices determining status, privilege, and other social rewards (Lareau,

2003). The dominant class rationalized those practices by suggesting they were the

direct result of talent, intelligence, and effort. According to Bourdieu, individuals are

socialized differently depending on their location within the societal class structure.

Each individual has a habitus. Bourdieu defines the habitus as a set of internalized

dispositions that determines what is comfortable and natural (Lareau, 2003).

Differences in the habitus allow individuals to develop varying educational practices

and forms of value. The socialization that occurs determines what social practices are valued by each individual, in turn, this may influence why individuals ascribe different meanings to terms such as "success" (Lareau, 2003). The social position that an individual holds in society impacts the individual's potential to acquire certain types of capital such social, economic, cultural, and symbolic. Cultural capital is the non-financial assets that determine an individual's position within society such as education, clothing, and speech. Individuals from the dominant class will develop cultural capital that is recognized by the dominant institutions, while other individuals will not (Lareau, 2003). Society is able to determine the skills and behaviors that are valued. Bourdieu (1989) suggests that institutional constraints, such as class structures and the development of capital, also aid individuals in constructing their perception of reality (Bourdieu, 1989).

<div style="text-align:center">Construction of Ideas, Definitions, and Values</div>

Those that do not hold power will undoubtedly define objects or terms differently than the dominant class that holds the economic, social, and political power; however, reflecting on its conflict theory roots, Bourdieu argues that it is only the dominant class' definition that will be legitimized by the institutions within society (1989). Once the dominant class' definition is legitimized, power is maintained and the status quo is upheld through the process of manipulation (Femia, 1975). Based on Bourdieu's (1989) theory of cultural capital it can logically be concluded that the

dominant class has the power to construct "success" to mean economic wealth or the acquisition of power for oneself. Bourdieu (1977) uses the term "symbolic violence" to refer to the domination of particular classes or groups of people (Bourdieu, 1977). This social phenomenon is also known as what Gramsci (1975) refers to as cultural hegemony (Femia, 1975). The practices of hegemony and symbolic violence subject lower-class individuals to feelings of inferiority, resentment, and humiliation yet the oppressed are complicit in their oppression by supporting the structures that maintain this inequality (Bourdieu, 1977). Karl Marx, a steadfast conflict theorist, was the first to point out the existing class structure identifying the owners of the means of production as the capitalists and those who only have their labor to sell as the proletariats. Marx offered a potential solution to the oppression of the underserved and believed that if the workers developed "class consciousness" they would truly understand the nature of their condition (Marx & Engels, 1888; Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). Critical theory strives to understand the lived experiences of individuals in a sociohistorical context; however, the theory is most interested in interpreting acts and symbols in an effort to understand the oppression of certain groups within society. Within this theory knowledge is power. It is only through critical understanding and critical discourse that true social change can be achieved (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008).

The hermeneutic tradition built on the ideas of critical theory by recognizing that awareness and critical understanding were the key to grasping the lived experiences that

were explored in the social sciences. Hermeneutics can be defined as a method or principle of interpretation (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). Willhelm Dilthey, a German philosopher and historian, broadened the range of the field by moving it from the analysis of ancient texts to developing a general philosophical argument concerning the necessary differences of interpretation in the social and natural sciences (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). Dilthey asserted that analysis within the social sciences could not be mechanistic and causal due to the way that social life manifests itself. As a result, Dilthey believed that it was only through interpretive understanding that one could grasp the complexity of lived experience. Dilthey also acknowledged that sociohistorical conditions and contextual factors influenced individuals' understanding (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008).

The hermeneutic tradition laid the foundation for what became known as the theory of social construction. One of the hallmark works that served to solidify the theory of social construction as a viable empirical perspective for the social sciences was Peter Berger's and Thomas Luckmann's The Social Construction of Reality (1966) (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). Berger and Luckmann (1966) focused on the importance of social knowledge in the construction of reality. The authors steer clear of making ontological claims and concentrate on epistemological claims surrounding the study of knowledge and justified belief. Berger and Luckmann (1966) encouraged the investigation of the "taken-for-granted reality-constructing processes of everyday life"

(Holstein & Gubrium, 2008, p.4; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). They sought to explore the rules and strategies that aided in the development of constructing reality. Essentially, Berger and Luckmann challenged individuals to question how their reality became reality (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008).

While the theory of social construction proved to be very beneficial to the field of social science, there are still those that are skeptical about the theory's usefulness and applicability in social research settings (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). The main critiques of the theory of social construction generally derive from realist and relativist perspectives. The realist perspective is concerned with depicting reality accurately and is not concerned with how researchers construct their understandings (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). Like positivists, realists just assume that the findings are true based on scientific evidence or theory; however, the theory of social construction would argue that scientific theory itself is a social construct (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). On the other hand, relativists believe that no definitive truth exists and that there are multiple realities to represent social phenomenon. Scholars such as Gergen (1978;1996), Hacking (1999), Hammerseley (1992), and Rorty (1979) believe that the theory of social constructionism is not a viable method of research because there will always be multiple realities with each side claiming legitimacy, however, the theory of social construction is not concerned with universal truths or definitions (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). The theory of social construction is most concerned with identifying the multiple

realities and exploring the social processes that aid in constructing the multiple realities (Holstein & Gubrium. 2008).

Factors that Contribute to the Development of Success as a Social Construct

The literature on the theory of social construction indicates that institutionalization and personal experience have a significant influence on how individuals ascribe meaning to objects, symbols, and ideas (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 1996; Sismondo, 1993). The proceeding section of the paper will examine each factor as it relates to how stakeholders within the Dallas County Truancy Court may ascribe meaning to the term "success".

Institutionalization

Sismondo (1993) asserts that institutions, such as the local, state, and national government, are not naturally occurring products of Earth, but instead are man-made. Through institutions, the process of institutionalization occurs as a result of what is known as habitualization. Habitualization is evident when actions and behaviors become routine and are controlled through sanctions, such as legislation.

Educational Legislation

The social construction of success through a sociohistorical process at the legislative level impacts the implementation of compulsory education policies in ways that influence stakeholders' understanding of success. This section of the paper presents legislation used to provide a framework for defining success in the educational setting.

Compulsory education refers to the laws that require children to obtain an education by attending public school. This law was expanded to include private school and homeschooling as a substitute for a public education (Ornstein & Levine, 1984). While each state has a law regarding compulsory education, the laws differ from state to state regarding the length of time that children must receive a state-approved education. For example, in Mississippi and Tennessee, the compulsory education age is 6 to 17 years of age, while in California, Hawaii, Ohio, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin the compulsory education age is 6 to 18 years of age (Ornstein & Levine, 1984).

Initially, education in the United States was deemed only for the elite and wealthy. These individuals had the financial means to attend private institutions and were seen as having a higher intellectual capacity and understanding of the norms and values needed to succeed in that educational setting (Ornstein & Levine, 1984) . However, in 1918, the government mandated a public education for children of all social classes. Along with the mandate, the National Education Association's (NEA) Commission on Reorganization of Secondary Education developed a curriculum that was designed to sort students into different career paths (Ornstein & Levine, 1984). The curriculum included the following categories:

1.   College preparatory or academic program

2.   Commercial or business program

3.   Industrial, vocational, home economics, and agricultural program

4.   A modified academic program for terminal students (Ornstein & Levine, 1984,

        p.169-170).

The Coleman Report (1966) and A Nation at Risk (1983) influenced the development of

the ideology behind NEA's secondary education curriculum. Both reports have

documented the inequities and issues within the public education system and as a result,

defining success became a priority to the United States government particularly as

international comparisons became the norm and the U.S. was engaged in an

"achievement" race with the USSR. The acknowledgement of problems such as

segregation, growing achievement gaps within national subpopulations and

internationally, and accountability within the United States public education system led

law makers to create more educational options for parents to choose from such as

homeschooling, vouchers, and charter schools (Burke & Sheffield, 2013).

        While parents may be provided with more options, students are left to find their

way through a defective educational system (Guare & Cooper, 2003). Guare and

Cooper (2003), argue that some students may not understand the requirements in

regards to compulsory education and truancy laws; however as rational consumers of

education, there are also some students that are making a calculated choice to become

truant due to the differing norms and values that are rewarded in public educational

institutions (Guare & Cooper, 2003). For example, passing and scoring high marks on

standardized assessments is highly valued in the U.S. educational system. Students that

do not perform well on standardized assessments may make a calculated choice to not be present on test days or to not have any part of a system that rewards students primarily based on test scores. After compulsory attendance, it became apparent that due to social and institutional factors, some students would need additional assistance to achieve at proficient levels and be successful in school.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965)

On April 9, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson valiantly declared war on poverty by ensuring the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Section 201 of the ESEA clearly acknowledged the rationale of the legislation by stating that:

> In recognition of the special educational needs of low-income families and the impact that concentrations of low-income families have on the ability of local educational agencies to support adequate educational programs, the Congress hereby declares it to be the policy of the United States to provide financial assistance… to local educational agencies serving areas with concentrations of children from low-income families to expand and improve their educational programs by various means (including preschool programs) which contribute to meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965, Section 201).

The premise of the act was that equal access to education would break the cycle of poverty and in turn, create more productive citizens. The legislation deduced that students from low-income families would need more educational services and resources than students from middle income or high income families because their parents do not have the ability to afford basic needs, early education programs, or enrichments activities. These additional educational services, resources, and supports were provided by a special funding source created by Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. "Title I: Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged" provided funds and other federal formula grants for numerous programs to be developed to address issues that predominantly impact low income students such as truancy and substance abuse (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965). Programs such as special pre-school, after school activities, summer enrichment, and tutorials in math and reading are specifically designed for at-risk youth. According to Section 1432 of Title I, Part D:

> The term 'at-risk,' when used with respect to a child, youth, or student, means a
> school aged individual who is at-risk of academic failure, has a drug or alcohol
> problem, is pregnant or is a parent, has come into contact with the juvenile
> justice system in the past, is at least 1 year behind the expected grade level for
> the age of the individual, has limited English proficiency, is a gang member, has

dropped out of school in the past, or has a high absenteeism rate at school

(Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965)

To qualify for Title I funds 5% of the student population within the district of a local

education agency must be categorized as low income. Local education agencies then

funnel funds to schools that have a high population of low income students. Currently,

there are over 56,000 schools that participate in the program (Center for Education

Statistics, 2013). Title I funds that are received by schools are typically allocated to

create specific programs to target at-risk youth; however, if at least 40% of the school

population is considered to be low-income, schools are allowed to create school-wide

programs to target all students (Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

While this legislation did not explicitly define the term "success" it strongly

insinuated that for an "at-risk" child to be successful there would have to be extra

supports, programs, and resources available. ESEA did however construct "at-risk"

youth as intellectually inferior and potentially problematic in traditional educational

settings by setting them apart from their peers. The Coleman Report (1966) further

developed and publicized the construction of at-risk youth as inferior.

Coleman Report (1966)

Shortly after the passage of the ESEA, the United States Office of Education

commissioned research to ensure that educational institutions were conforming to the

requirements of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The act called for equal treatment

regardless of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. In 1966, James S. Coleman, a

sociologist affiliated with John's Hopkins University, issued a report that totaled more

than 700 pages entitled "Equality of Educational Opportunity," best known as The

Coleman Report. The report concluded that the student's family background,

socioeconomic status, racial composition of the schools, and the student's perceived

control in determining their future were far more related to academic achievement

rather than the quality of a student's school (Coleman, 1966). The report led to debates

over the most efficient use of resources to assist disadvantaged students, Coleman was

widely criticized by educators as legislators took his report to justify cuts in education

to urban schools and also used it to support their culture of poverty views.

In essence, Coleman (1966) was advocating for the desegregation of schools that

had high minority concentrations and proposed integration by bussing students to

schools that had lower levels of minority students. Years later, Coleman would

withdraw his advocacy for bussing due to the social phenomenon known as "white

flight" in which white families moved to suburban areas to avoid desegregated schools.

This movement decreased the chances of achieving a racial balance within public

educational institutions (Kiviat, 2001). The report contradicted the rationale and

strategies used by Lyndon B. Johnson to declare war on poverty by suggesting that

special programs and racial integration would not improve academic achievement.

Instead, Coleman (1966) and other researchers that have reanalyzed the initial data

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suggest that growth in academic achievement can only be accomplished by raising the family's overall income (Kiviat, 2001). These findings provided the impetus for those opposed to social welfare programs to contest school programs aimed at helping "at-risk" youth. According to Coleman (1966), the structural or institutional factors were not to blame for the lack of achievement among minority youth, but instead individual social factors were the culprit. So, instead of looking at the structure of institutions, minority youth and their families were labeled as inferior and blamed for their failures (Coleman, 1966; Kiviat, 2001). The Coleman Report highlighted the fact that minority youth were achieving at lower levels; however, seventeen years later, "A Nation at Risk" (1983) concluded that all students were achieving at lower levels when compared to other developed countries (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

A Nation at Risk (1983)

President Ronald Reagan created The National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983, to examine scholarly research and data on the quality of teaching and learning in public and private K-12 and post-secondary educational institutions (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). In 1983, the 18-member commission issued a ground breaking report entitled "A Nation at Risk" that argued that:

Part of what is at risk is the promise first made on this continent: All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools

for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This

promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently

guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure

gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only

their own interests but also the progress of society itself" (The National

Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

The report analyzed the academic performance and achievement of United States

students and concluded that it was steadily declining. For example, the commission

found that nationally about 13% of all 17-year olds were considered to be functionally

literate, however, among minority youth that number increased to 40%. Students were

consistently exhibiting the inability to develop and apply higher order thinking skills

(The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report indicated that

only about 60% of 17-year olds in the U.S. could draw conclusions based on written

texts, that over 60% of students could not solve mathematic problems involving

multiple steps, and only 20% were capable of writing a persuasive essay (The United

States Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). These trends were not only

found at secondary institutions, they were also quite evident at the post-secondary

institutions. Post-secondary students had declining Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)

scores and an increased demand for remedial courses at 4-year institutions, specifically

in mathematics (The United States Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The

report attributed the findings to a diluted curriculum that was void of measurable

standards (The United States Commission on Excellence in Educcation, 1983). To

ensure lasting reform within the U.S. educational system, the commission suggested

that teachers and administrators should demand "the best effort and performance from

all students, whether they are gifted or less able, affluent or disadvantaged, whether

destined for college, the farm, or industry" (The United States Commission on

Excellence in Education, 1983). "A Nation at Risk" raised the consciousness of

individuals involved in the educational process and set in motion the construction of

standards based reform and achievement testing (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003) . During

that time, there were no established accountability mechanisms used within states,

districts, or schools to measure student success or growth. It was not until the passage of

the Improving America's Schools Act (1994) that the concept of accountability was

mentioned and that content and performance standards were developed to measure

student achievement.

Improving America's Schools Act of (1994)

The passing of the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) was an answer to

the National Commission on Excellence in Education's call to action. The act

reauthorized the ESEA of 1965 and mandated that all states develop content standards,

performance standards, assessments aligned with the standards to measure student

achievement, and accountability systems to monitor individual schools' levels of

achievement (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003) . IASA promoted higher levels of student

achievement for all students and endorsed five guiding principles:

1. High standards for all students

2. A focus on teaching and learning

3. Partnerships among families, communities and schools

4. Flexibility coupled with responsibility for student performance

5. Resources targeted to areas of greatest needs (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003)

IASA did not strive to define student success, but attempted to identify the factors that

needed to be present within educational institutions in order for students to achieve

success. It was the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994) that clearly stated specific

goals that needed to be met to determine student success.

Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994)

This act was designed to work in conjunction with IASA to raise the

achievement levels of all students by providing additional resources to states and by

developing higher expectations for students (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). The act

stated that by the year 2000:

1. All children in America will start school ready to learn.

2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.

3. All students will leave grades 4,8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over

   challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign

languages, civics and government, economics, the arts, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation's modern economy.

4. United States students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement. Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

5. Every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conductive to learning.

6. The nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.

7. Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003).

The ideas of standards based reform and achievement testing were now becoming ingrained into the U.S. educational system. Ideas of what defines a successful student

were slowly being constructed. According to the frameworks set in place by IASA and

Goals 2000, a successful student comes to school ready to learn, is literate, graduates

from high school, and exhibits competency over subject matter in core classes as

evidenced by achievement test scores (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003) .

No Child Left Behind (2001)

In an effort to fully understand the implications and rationale associated with No

Child Left Behind (NCLB) in regards to defining the construct of success, it is

necessary to look at educational reform prior to NCLB. No Child Left Behind (NCLB),

another reauthorization of EASA was developed with the notion that "every child in

America – regardless of ethnicity, income, or background – [could] achieve high

standards" (United States Department of Education, 2003). The law was novel in that

funding was now tied to the accountability expectations that were initially required by

IASA. NCLB also mandated that the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) be measured as

another form of accountability. AYP must be measured by the following individual

subgroups: students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, each of the

5 race/ethnicity groups, and students who are limited English proficient (LEP). More

importantly for this research project, are the other indicators used to determine AYP

such as graduation rates, attendance rates, retention rates, and completion of advanced

placement and college preparatory courses (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). Upon the

initial passage of NCLB, the success of a student was primarily determined by state

standardized assessments. Because such an emphasis was placed on standardized assessments, states began to teach to the test and lower standards so that students would score at proficient levels on the standardized assessment and so that the school could meet AYP (Hayes 2008; Peterson & West; 2003). These practices contradicted the intended outcome of the legislation, thereby necessitating a reform of NCLB to ensure that reliable mechanisms were being used to measure student success.

Reform of No Child Left Behind (2010)

The reform of NCLB still focused on creating equity for all students using standards based reform and accountability; however, there were more supports provided for schools to meet AYP and achieve growth and progress (Hayes, 2008). In the initial version of the bill, meeting AYP meant that schools had to increase the number of students performing at a proficient level by 10%. The 2010 reform of NCLB takes into account individual school-wide progress toward closing the achievement gap and individual student growth over a period of time (Hayes, 2008). The framework of NCLB suggests that a successful student can be defined as one who attends school regularly, scores at a proficient level on state standardized tests, graduates in four years, is college or career ready, and completes some advanced placement, gifted and talented, or college preparatory courses for those focused on attending a 4-year university (Hayes, 2008).

How is Success Defined Based on Previous Educational Law?

The rules for defining success that emerged from previous legislation were a factor in how truancy reduction programs currently define success. Based on the initial reform efforts of compulsory education, success was defined as whether or not a student was physically present at school. The national compulsory education law does not state that a student is required to be engaged, learn, or graduate and pursue further education. It simply states that a student must attend school between a specified age range to be in accordance with the law. Federal law does not mandate that students achieve any of the goals stated in IASA, Goals 2000, and NCLB. Since the federal government cannot force states to adopt these guidelines, the federal government uses funding as an incentive to entice states to go along. Ultimately, the only thing that the federal government can mandate is that students attend school.

After realizing that our nation was at risk and acknowledging that U.S. students were lagging behind other students in developed countries, the IASA and Goals 2000 laws were developed to make sure that there were clear standards for measuring student academic achievement and growth such as graduation rates and standardized assessments aligned to predetermined standards (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). The introduction of NCLB built on the ideas of IASA and Goals 2000, however, the bill called for more stringent guidelines for measuring success. NCLB introduced the idea of AYP which allowed for individual student, school growth, and progress to be

measured. Results were broken down by subgroups (5 major racial groups, LEP, disability, and economically disadvantaged) in the following categories: performance levels on standardized assessments in reading and math, graduation rates, and attendance rates. According to school reform legislation, success can be defined as meeting proficient levels on math and reading standardized assessments, attending school regularly, and ultimately graduating (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). States can choose to ignore these standards and opt out of NCLB. They forgo substantial funding in the process, but several states have chosen this approach arguing that these reform efforts are detrimental to their students, and that districts can do a better job of developing contextually appropriate interventions without federal intervention. Some states that have opted out of NCLB include Texas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, and Tennessee.

<div align="center">Personal Experience</div>

Gergen (196) contends that individuals' social constructions are at times based on private, personal experience. Berger and Luckmann (1966) encouraged the investigation of the "taken-for-granted reality-constructing processes of everyday life" and acknowledged that individuals create their own realities based on their experience and interactions with other individuals (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008, p.4; Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Can the term "success" be considered a social construct?

Success can be defined as "a degree or measure of succeeding" or "a favorable or desired outcome." (Webster Online Dictionary, n.d.). Effectiveness can be understood as "the degree to which objectives are achieved and the extent to which targeted problems are solved", therefore, throughout this paper the terms "success" and "effectiveness" will be used interchangeably (Business Online Dictionary, n.d.). Defining student success equates to determining if students are effectively meeting performance and content standards as prescribed by federal, state, and local legislation.

A recent piece of evidence of the social construction of success is a study conducted by Fassertt (2001) in which she facilitated group interviews among two categories of student participants: students enrolled in an introductory speech course and graduate teaching assistants teaching the introductory speech course. The main goal of the research was to understand the processes by which educational success and failure were constructed and the impact that had on educational reform. Overall, the researcher found that participants' definitions of success and non-success varied and therefore, concluded that success was socially constructed. Fassett (2001) explored success as an internal and external construction. An internal construction of success was characterized by participants' perceptions of whether or not they were achieving their individual educational goals, while an external construction of success was indicated by the use of pre-established criteria to measure (i.e. "progress toward a degree plan, high

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marks in class, satisfying a given teacher or teachers, [and] finding employment upon graduation") (Fassett, 2001, p.7). Participants who regarded success as an internal construction provided the following commentary and definitions of success:

> I have a problem with some of the definitions of being successful because a student's goal may not necessarily be to get a degree…I think it's an individual goal-oriented thing (Fassett, 2001, p. 4).

> It is like to me individual. If you go to class, you know, maybe like once or twice a week, get the basic idea, and then study on your own and cut class, you pull off like B's. I mean, maybe you can do average without even working hard. That might be your success, you know (Fassett, 2001, p.5).

> [Being a successful student means] walking away and actually learning something. I have had classes where I pulled off an A, and I don't know jack by the time I leave…I haven't learned anything, and to me, what good does having a degree or diploma in hand if by the time you get out in the real world, you are completely lost (Fassett, 2001, p.5)?
> "I think its like different for everybody like they – one might define success differently as being content, or more the outside goals or something" (Fassett, 2001, p.5).

Participants who viewed success as an external construction provided the following

commentary and definitions of success:

> I derive the word success from what I know from the system. I said what's
>
> successful, well, doing well, and where do I trace that back to? Well, I trace that
>
> back to society and what's successful in society" (Fassett, 2001, p.6).

> I think it's really a matter of having that piece of paper saying you've done this
>
> and you've done that" (Fassett, 2001, p. 6).

> …the way the grading system is set up, it, it is pretty much just doing what
>
> you're asked to do (Fassett, 2001, p. 6).

Students either categorized the construct of success as the achievement of

individual educational goals or meeting goals that were predetermined by institutions

within the educational system (Fassett, 2001). Those that defined success as more of an

individual activity ascribe to the belief of most Americans in the educational system,

which is that we live in a meritocracy and individuals have the power to determine their

future (Fassett, 2001). Those that defined success as predetermined by institutions saw

themselves as outside of the educational system and not having any power to influence

how success was defined and determine their future. Fassett (2001) concluded that the construction of definitions serve to reinforce the status quo and slow educational reform (Fassett, 2001).

The goal of this research is to use the framework provided by the theory of social constructionism to determine if the term "success" is a shared construct among stakeholders involved with truancy reduction programs. If varying definitions of success exist among stakeholders, then not only identifying these definitions is important, but also understanding the processes that create those different definitions is vital. If there are varying definitions of success among stakeholders, the research will also aim to classify if they are external or internal constructions. If the stakeholder's definition is constructed using federal law or some type of formal institutional policy, then it can be considered an external construction; however, if the stakeholder's definition is constructed by personal experiences, biases, or beliefs it can be considered an internal construct. It is possible that through the interaction with stakeholders, an interpretive understanding of the process regarding the construction of the term "success" may be reached.

<center>Defining Truancy</center>

Inconsistent definitions of truancy across states have impacted the data regarding the occurrence of truancy and the effect of truancy reduction programs. Developing consistent definitions of truancy is vital because No Child Left Behind

(2001) requires that states report truancy rates (McGillvary, 2006). If definitions of truancy are inconsistent across states it will be difficult to compare the occurrence of truancy across states, as well as, the efficacy of truancy reduction programs (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001; McGillvary, 2006).

The general definition of truancy is an unexcused absence from school by a child who is required to comply with compulsory education laws (Zinth, 2005). This general definition is consistent across states; however, the number and time frame within which these absences must occur fluctuates. For example, in Texas a habitual truant is classified as a student who does not attend school on ten or more days or parts of days within a six-month period within the same school year or on three or more days or parts of days within a four-week period (Zinth, 2005). Colorado deems a habitual truant as a student who has accumulated ten or more unexcused absences during only one school year. In contrast, the states of Nevada, California, and Pennsylvania declare a student habitually truant if they have three or more unapproved absences within one school year (Zinth, 2005). In comparison, the states of Arizona and Wyoming consider a student habitually truant if they have five or more unexcused absences. Florida and Illinois provide their students with more leeway in their attendance policies. Florida allows fifteen unexcused absences within ninety calendar days before a student is declared habitually truant, while Illinois allows eighteen unexcused absences before a student is labeled as a chronic truant (Zinth, 2005). In most cases, it is generally

understood that habitually truant students are at a greater risk of becoming a high school dropout. A high school dropout can be defined as a high school student who abandons pursuing academic objectives that are necessary for graduation from a secondary educational institution (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). It is vital that the issue of truancy is addressed to prevent students from completely disengaging from the educational process.

One major issue concerning the definition of truancy is what constitutes an unexcused absence. Parents may excuse an absence for their child, but school officials may not accept the excuse. Further issues arise when determining truancy among public and private schools. Are procedures for reporting truancy rates different for public and private educational institutions? Another discrepancy in reporting truancy rates may occur when disciplinary actions take students out of the educational setting. Are absences due to suspension and expulsion excused? (Bye, Alvarez, Haynes, & Sweigart, 2010).

Reid and Kendall (1982) previously explored the literature on truancy and investigated the definitional discrepancies that existed concerning truancy and the difficulty in obtaining accurate attendance records. Variations in attendance rates between schools and geographic areas suggested that factors such as social, institutional, psychological, and familial factors may contribute to truancy. Reid (1982) suggests exploring the issue of truancy further by developing a universal definition of

truancy and evaluating how schools may impact truancy and the potential effects of employment on attendance rates (Reid, 1982).

Who are Truants?

Throughout the process of developing and implementing truancy reduction programs, it is important to recognize what makes truants different from non-truants. Research has found that school, family, and personal factor increase the likelihood that students will become truant (Bell et. al., 1994; Corville-Smith, 1998). School factors include poor relationships with teachers, vague and inconsistent attendance policies, and inappropriate academic placement due to standardized testing or tracking. Family factors that have been found to increase the likelihood of truancy include large family size, poverty, homelessness, transportation, single-parent home, lack of parental involvement, caring for younger siblings, family discord, and working to support the family. Personal factors such as values ascribed to education, mental and physical health, self-esteem, poor peer relationships, and poor academic performance can also influence a student's decision to become truant (Fornwalt, 1947; Eastwold, 1989; Rohrman, 1993; Bell, Rosen, & Dyblacht, 1994; Dustmann, Rajah, & Smith, 1997; Corville-Smith, et. al., 1998; Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001; Garrison, 2006; Southwell, 2006;Heilbrunn, 2007; Hallinan, 2008).

Sommer and Nagel (1991) sought to identify more distinguishing characteristics between truant and non-truants. Although his sample size is small, it does suggest some

useful finding. Data from the school records of 25 truant eighth graders and 25 non-truant eighth graders was collected. The data matched the two groups of students based on age, grade, gender, and socioeconomic level. The study examined the parental marital status, number of siblings, number of previous addresses, and time in the district. Sommer and Nagel (1991) concluded that truant students are "less likely to live with both parents, had more siblings, and scored lower in academic ability and achievement (Sommer & Nagel, 1991, p.379)." Veenstra, Lindenberg, Tinga, & Ormel (2010) found additional factors to be related to the occurrence of truancy such as being a boy and early pubertal development (Veenstra, Lindenberg, Tinga, & Ormel, 2010).

Zhang, Wilson, Katsiyannis, Barrett, Ju, & Wu (2010) also sought to examine the characteristics of truancy offenders in the juvenile justice system by analyzing data covering a cohort of delinquent youth between the years of 1981-1988. Zhang et.al. (2010) found that race was associated with truancy. There were higher rates of repeated truancy among African American youth as opposed to their white counterparts. Zhang et.al. (2010) attributed the higher rate of truancy among African Americans to school, peer, family, and societal factors. This study, as well as the previous studies, highlighted the need for multifaceted intervention techniques to address the problem of truancy (Zhang, Wilson, Katsiyannis, Barrett, Ju, & Wu, 2010).

What is Success?

The purpose of this research project is to determine how key stakeholders involved with the Dallas County Truancy Court define success within truancy reduction programs. The research project will focus on determining how individual programs define success, as well as, how the success of students is defined since the two are undeniably linked; one cannot occur without the other. According to the Webster's Dictionary, "success" can be defined as "a degree or measure of succeeding" or "a favorable or desired outcome."

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Chapter three focuses on the research design and the methods used to obtain

data to answer the following research questions: 1) What are the challenges faced in

defining success when multiple organizations with multiple stakeholders are involved in

a decentralized arrangement? 2) How is success of a truancy reduction program defined

by school districts, school principals, parents, and judges? 3) Is the definition of success

used by schools, districts, and the state the same as the definition of success used by key

stakeholders and nonprofit organizations that work with truant students? The methods

chapter contains nine sections. The beginning of the chapter describes the specific

research design and explains why this research design is most suitable for answering the

research questions, as well as identifies the role of the researcher and any potential

biases that may be present. The early part of the chapter also examines the Dallas

County Truancy Court and the six school districts that are serviced by the Court. This

section highlights the unique characteristics present within each school district and

among their student populations. The latter part of the chapter focuses on the

characteristics of the specific population used in the study and how they were selected

for participation in the study; and identifies ethical issues and the measures that were

taken to make sure that the participants' rights were protected. Additionally, this section

describes the specific interview protocol used to collect data and provides a rationale for the specific questions used in the interview protocol and provides the procedures used during the data collection process. The last part of the chapter focuses on the specific procedures used to analyze the data. The ninth section explores the concepts of reliability, validity, and generalizability and identifies how this study addressed each of those issues. Lastly, any limitations that were present within the study are identified.

Research Design

This study determined if the major stakeholders within the Dallas County Truancy Court had the same definition of success. To make that determination, a case study analysis was conducted to determine if the definition of success varied across organizational levels (i.e. parents, schools, courts, and non-profit organizations) of a single organizational field centered on the Dallas County Truancy Court. The Dallas County Truancy Court is one truancy reduction program that consists of multiple stakeholders and organizations working towards a common goal: to reduce the occurrence of truancy. Qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews were the most effective strategy because it allowed the researcher to explore the meaning that participants ascribed to a particular term, specifically "success" through the use of open-ended questioning. It also provided the researcher with a rich source of information that could yield a broader context which facilitated the interpretation of the analysis (Creswell, 2003). While quantitative survey research necessitates

predetermined standardized categories, qualitative research, specifically the type that employs open-ended interview questions does not constrain the scope of participant's responses and allowed the researcher to develop an authentic understanding of the participants' perception or understanding of a social phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Lofland (1997) exemplified this view when he stated that "To capture participants' in their own terms one must learn their categories for rendering explicable and coherent the flux of raw reality. That, indeed, is the first principle of qualitative analysis" (Lofland, 1997, p.7). Simply put, throughout the interview process, it was important to note the external and internal factors that impacted and influenced participants' constructions of the definition of success.

The participants for the research project were selected based on their affiliation with the Dallas County Truancy Court. Judges, principals, and non-profit organizations were contacted through email and/or by phone to solicit participation; however, the parent participation was solicited through referrals by the court case manager and non-profit organizations. The researcher conducted a total of fifty-nine interviews that consisted of four judges, twenty parents, thirteen non-profits, and twenty-two school principals. There were two stakeholders who declined to participate: a judge with the Dallas County Truancy Court and the Mesquite Independent School District declined to allow any of their principals to participate. The interviews were recorded and were transcribed by a third party. The interviews took place at the Dallas County Truancy

Court, the site of the non-profit organization, and the respective schools of each of the principals.

<div align="center">Role of the Researcher</div>

This researcher acknowledged an affiliation with one of the districts that are serviced by the Dallas County Truancy Court. I have worked at a high school within the district for four years as a teacher. I continue to be employed through this district and develop intervention strategies for truant students. Multiple students in my classes have been referred to the Dallas County Truancy Court and I have been exposed to their viewpoint regarding the process, as well as been privy to the outcomes associated with those students. The interactions with those students have helped to inform my view and understanding of the Dallas County Truancy Court. The principal interviewed at my specific school was not my supervising principal and one with which I had minimal direct contact, so there was no perceived power differential when gathering data.

The bias this affiliation may represent was monitored by using an interview protocol, focusing on the research questions throughout the interview, and being cognizant of my expectations and preferences by jotting down my preconceived expectations and biases and noting where there were gaps. The bias was also monitored by using triangulation. The participants were emailed the transcribed interview and were allowed the option of clarifying any of the data obtained during the interview (Creswell, 2003).

The Dallas County Truancy Court

The Dallas County Truancy Court was established in 2001 and services Dallas, Garland, Mesquite, Richardson, and Sunnyvale Independent School Districts and the Texas Can Charter School. There are other districts that are a part of Dallas County; however, they have elected not to participate in the Dallas County Truancy Court. There are five courts located in various parts of Dallas County in order to be accessible to students, parents, and administrators. A judge and a case manager have been appointed to each Court. Student services administrators, community liaisons, truancy officers, or other district and/or school personnel work directly with the Court. Each district is required to adhere to Texas state law regarding truancy, but has flexibility in the way in which their truancy reduction program is administered. Chapter 25 of the Texas Education Code states that districts must file a case on a child if that child misses ten or more days or parts of days within a 6-month period or if a child misses three or more days or parts of days within a four week period (2 Tex. Ed. Code § 25.94). In addition to the filing, districts are required to file a statement that documents the interventions that have been tried with the student prior to the filing (2 Tex. Ed. Code § 25.91). The mandatory interventions are the area in which schools have flexibility and can uniquely

design the interventions to fit their student population. Dallas County is the only county to have a specialized truancy court that solely hears truancy cases. The mission of the Dallas County Truancy Courts "is to hear cases timely and ensure consistency in disposition and enforcement of the truancy court orders." (http://www.dallascounty.org/department/countyclerk/truancylocations.php). Dallas, Garland, Mesquite, Richardson, and Sunnyvale Independent School Districts and the Texas Can Charter School each have unique challenges, circumstances, and student populations, so the following sections will individually examine each of the six districts serviced by the Dallas County Truancy Court (See table 1.1, 1.2, &1.3)

Dallas Independent School District

Dallas Independent School District (DISD) is the 14th largest school district in the United States and provides education to approximately 157,575 students. DISD has 227 campuses with 40 being designated as high schools that provide education to 38,018 students (www.dallasisd.org). Over half of the student population is Hispanic (68.7%), about a quarter of the student population is African American (24.4%), and 4.7% is White (Texas Education Agency, 2012). Over three-quarters (86.1%) of the student population is categorized as economically disadvantaged and over half (61.8%) is considered to be at-risk (Texas Education Agency, 2012).   According to the council of the Great City Schools, DISD is "one of the nation's fastest improving districts" (www.dallasisd.org). DISD is also well known for its magnet schools such as Yvonne

A. Ewell Townview Center's School of Science and Engineering and School for the Talented and Gifted. In addition to the many magnet schools, DISD has also opened three early college high schools that allow students to earn dual credits. DISD recognizes the importance of effective instruction and academic achievement and has a core belief that at-risk students should achieve at the same rate as non-at risk students (www.dallasisd.org). DISD's ultimate goal is to "have the highest college and career ready percentage graduates of any large, urban district in the nation" (www.dallasisd.org). DISD is currently in the process of completing a $1.35 billion building program to build new facilities and renovate old ones to improve the students' learning environments (www.dallasisd.org). The overall attendance rate in DISD is 95.2%, which is 0.5% below the state attendance rate (Texas Education Agency, 2012). The 4-year graduation rate is 77.3%, which is 8.6% below the state graduation rate (Texas Education Agency, 2012). The dropout rate is 2.8%, which is .4% above the state dropout rate (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

Garland Independent School District

Garland Independent School District (GISD) is the second largest district in Dallas County and the twelfth largest district in the state of Texas. GISD has 71 campuses that provide an education to 58,000 students. There are seven high schools that provide an education to 17,309 students (www.garlandisd.net). About half of the student population is Hispanic (48.8%), 17.1% African American, 23.4% White, and

8% Asian (Texas Education Agency, 2012). Over half (60.6%) of the student

population is categorized as economically disadvantaged and almost half (45.4%) is

considered to be at-risk (Texas Education Agency, 2012). GISD's mission is to create a

shared vision among their diverse community and provide an exceptional education to

all of its students. Like DISD, GISD believes that all children regardless of their socieo-

economic status and race should achieve at equally high levels. GISD is one of the few

districts across the United States that open enrollment options to students. GISD does

not use attendance zones to determine the school that a student attends, but instead

allows parents to choose (www.garlandisd.net). Most students (97%-98%) receive their

first choice. GISD also offers dual credit, International Baccalaureate program, career

and technology educational clusters (television production, and broadcasting, law and

criminal justice, cosmetology, auto collision, and welding), and magnet programs

focusing on math, science, and technology (www.garlandisd.net). The overall

attendance rate in GISD is 96.7%, which is 1.0% above the state attendance rate (Texas

Education Agency, 2012). The four-year graduation rate is 87.7%, which is 1.8% above

the state graduation rate (Texas Education Agency, 2012). The dropout rate is 1.6%,

which is .8% below the state dropout rate (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

Mesquite Independent School District

Mesquite Independent School District (MISD) is located in East Dallas County

and encompasses communities in Mesquite, Garland, and Balch Springs, in addition to

some areas of Dallas. MISD has 46 campuses that educate 39,000 students. Nine

campuses within the district are designated as high schools (www.mesquiteisd.org).

About half (49.6%) of the student population is Hispanic, about a quarter (24.7%) is

African American, and about a fifth (20.8%) is White (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

Over half (68.3%) of the student population is categorized as economically

disadvantaged and about half (50.2%) is considered to be at-risk (Texas Education

Agency, 2012). MISD believes that challenging students with high expectations and a

rigorous curriculum will lead them to success. MISD also strives to nurture their

students' interests and talents by extracurricular programs and opportunities. The

overall vision of MISD is similar to that of DISD and GISD in that they want success

for all students (www.mesquiteisd.org). The overall attendance rate in MISD is 97%,

which is 1.3% below the state attendance rate (Texas Education Agency, 2012). The 4-

year graduation rate is 89%, which is 3.1% above the state graduation rate (Texas

Education Agency, 2012). The dropout rate is 1.6%, which is .8% below the state

dropout rate (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

<center>Richardson Independent School District</center>

Richardson Independent School District (RISD) is the largest diverse district in

Texas to earn a recognized rating over a six year period. RISD consist of 55 campuses;

four of those are designated as high schools. RISD provides an education to almost

38,000 students (www.risd.org). Unlike DISD, GISD, and MISD, the ethnicity of the

student population in RISD is more evenly dispersed. About 39% of the student

population is Hispanic, 28% White, and 23% African American (Texas Education

Agency, 2012). Over half (57.1%) of the student population is categorized as

economically disadvantaged and 42.7% are considered to be at-risk (Texas Education

Agency, 2012). The mission of RISD is to prepare students for their global future. RISD

offers dual credit and career and technology programs such as auto mechanic and

cosmetology (www.risd.org). The overall attendance rate in RISD is 96.3%, which is .6

above the state attendance rate (Texas Education Agency, 2012). The four-year

graduation rate is 90.6%, which is 4.7% above the state graduation rate (Texas

Education Agency, 2012). The dropout rate is 1.7%, which is .7% below the state

dropout rate (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

<div align="center">Sunnyvale Independent School District</div>

Sunnyvale Independent School District (SISD) was created in February of 1956.

Initially, SISD only served grades K-8; however, in May of 2007 a bond was passed to

build a high school facility so that students would not have to attend high school in

MISD. The class of 2011 were the first students to graduate from Sunnyvale High

School. Sunnyvale is a small community that covers seventeen miles and the district

consists of one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. The high

school educates around 400 students (www.sunnyvaleisd.com).   About half (49.1%) of

the student population is White, about a third (32.4%) is Asian, 11.3 % is Hispanic, and

5.6% is African American (Texas Education Agency, 2012). Only 8.6% of the student

population is categorized as economically disadvantaged and 10.5% are considered to

be at-risk (Texas Education Agency, 2012). The mission of SISD is to "provide the

highest quality education by creating life-long learners through comprehensive

academic, athletic, cultural, and extra-curricular opportunities for the children in the

community" (www.sunnyvaleisd.com). The district strives to create a hometown

learning community that focuses on individual student needs and achieving academic

excellence (www.sunnyvaleisd.com). The overall attendance rate in SISD is 98.2%,

which is 2.5% above the state attendance rate (Texas Education Agency, 2012). The

four-year graduation rate is 100%, which is 14.1% above the state average (Texas

Education Agency, 2012). The dropout rate is 0%, which is 2.4% below the state

dropout rate (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

<center>Texans Can Charter Schools</center>

Texans Can is an alternative school for students in juvenile services and high

school dropouts. Dallas County has four academies (www.texanscan.org). About half

(49.7%) of the student population is African American, about half (47.4%) is Hispanic,

and 1.7% is White (Texas Education Agency, 2012). The vast majority (95.1%) of the

student population is categorized as economically disadvantaged and 99.1% is

considered at-risk (Texas Education Agency, 2012). The mission of Texans Can Charter

Schools is to provide a quality education to students who have struggled in a traditional

high school setting so that they can be economically independent in the future. Texans Can encourages student decision-making, rigorous curriculum, and empowering students to succeed (www.texanscan.org). The overall attendance rate is 89.8%, which is 5.9% below the state attendance rate (Texas Education Agency, 2012). The four-year graduation rate is 39%, which is 46.9% below the state graduation rate (Texas Education Agency, 2012). The dropout rate is 5.8%, which is 3.4% above the state dropout rate (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

Table 1.1: District Campuses and Students Serviced

School District	Student Population for the Entire District	Total Number of Campuses	Number of High School Students for the Entire District	Number of High School Campuses
Dallas	157,575	227	38, 018	40
Garland	58,000	71	17,309	7
Mesquite	39,000	46	10,976	9
Richardson	38,000	55	8,800	4
Sunnyvale	1,009	3	400	1
Dallas Can	2,194	4	2,194	4

Table 1.2: District Demographic Data

School District	African America	Asian	Hispanic	White	Economically Disadvantaged	At-Risk
Dallas	24.4	*	68.7	4.7	86.1	61.8
Garland	17.1	8	48.8	23.4	60.6	45.4
Mesquite	24.7	*	49.6	20.8	68.3	50.2
Richardson	23	*	39	28	57.1	42.7
Sunnyvale	5.6	32.4	11.3	49.1	8.6	10.5
Dallas Can	49.7	*	47.4	1.7	95.1	99.1

Table 1.3: District AYP Data

School District	Attendance Rate	Four-year Graduation Rate	Dropout Rate
Dallas	95.2	77.3	2.8
Garland	96.7	87.7	1.6
Mesquite	97	89	1.6
Richardson	96.3	90.6	1.7
Sunnyvale	98.2	100	0
Dallas Can	89.8	39	5.8

Population and Sampling Procedures

This study identified how judges, parents, principals, and non-profit

organizations defined success. This specific set of participants was selected because

they are most directly involved with the design, implementation, and evaluation of

truancy reduction programs and are in a position to define success within their

institution, organization, or school. Stakeholder sampling was used to select

participants. Stakeholder sampling is a form of purposive sampling used to identify

major stakeholders involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs

or services. Participants are purposefully selected based on their knowledge or

interaction with the program or service (Lofland, 1997).

The major stakeholders were identified by determining the actors involved in the

truancy court process. Participants consisted of four of the five Judges presiding in the

Dallas County Truancy Court, parents of students who had been referred to the Dallas

County Truancy Court and had attended a truancy reduction program, administrators of non-profit organizations that provide services to students referred by the Dallas County Truancy Court, and high school principals in six of the seven districts (Dallas, Garland, Mesquite, Sunnyvale, Richardson, and Texans Can Charter Schools) serviced by the Dallas County Truancy Court.

Initial contact with judges, administrators of non-profit organizations, and high school principals was made through email. The email contained basic information about the objectives and procedures of the research for them to review. If there was no response, phone calls were used to follow-up and solicit participation. Based on those procedures, four interviews were scheduled with four different judges servicing the Dallas County Truancy Court. One of the judges was contacted through email and by phone over five times, but did not respond. Thirteen interviews were scheduled with administrators of nonprofit organizations. There are 49 nonprofit organizations that provide services to the Dallas County Truancy Court. There are different categories of services provided by the nonprofit organizations such as boot camp, community service, anger management, individual counseling, family counseling, crisis intervention, alternative education, GED prep, tutoring, mental health, parenting program, substance abuse, mentoring, truancy class, and youth development. Several of the nonprofit organizations provide services in multiple categories. Twenty-one interviews were scheduled with high school principals most directly involved with the issue of truancy.

One interview was scheduled with a student services coordinator who was authorized by the district to speak on behalf of the principals. Every effort was made to contact and schedule an interview with all judges, administrators of nonprofit organizations, and high school principals that were identified as stakeholders within the Dallas County Truancy Court, however; some were non-responsive or declined to participate.

Parents were asked to participate at the review hearing for their child at the Dallas County Truancy Court or at their review appointment with the following nonprofit organizations that they were assigned to by the case manager of the Dallas County Truancy Court: M.Y. G.I.R.L.S., Youth Conversion, Inc., and Youth Conflict Resolution. The review hearing at the Dallas County Truancy Court allowed the judge to review attendance records, behavioral records, certificates of program completion, verbal parent reports, and verbal student reports to determine if the parent and child had complied with the court's order. If the child and the parent were found to be in compliance with the court order, there were no additional consequences. However, if a child and a parent were not found to be in compliance with the court order, the judge would grant an extension based on the circumstances or assign additional fines or mandate additional services for the parent and/or child. The non-profit organizations also periodically monitored the attendance and behavior of the child. Typically nonprofit organizations would follow-up with the student once a week to review

attendance reports and discuss behavior or any other issues with the parent and/or the

child. Altogether, there were 20 parent interviews.

Table 2.1 Participant Characteristics: Judges

Judge	Length of Experience with Dallas County Truancy Court	Professional Legal Experience	Professional Educational Experience	District(s) Serviced
A	6 years	Prosecutor in Dallas and Collin County DA's office; Attorney for Child Protective Services, Justice of the Peace, District Court Judge	N/A	Garland
B	9 years	Defense attorney in juvenile cases and juvenile prosecutor for the Dallas County DA's office	20 years at the elementary level and 2 years at the middle school level	Dallas/Dallas Can
C	5 months	General Counsel of the Federal Regulatory Commission, private practice, District Attorney for the 90th Judicial District of Texas, Chief of the Felony Court in Wichita Falls, Texas, and a public defender and county attorney for Young County	N/A	Mesquite/Richardson
D	3 years	Licensed practicing attorney	Coached football and taught ESL and elective classes (psychology, sociology, street law, and advanced Texas history) in NY and Texas	Dallas/Dallas Can

Table 2.2 Participant Characteristics: Parents

Parent	District Child Attends	Program Assigned to Child
1	Dallas	Unidentified workshop
2	Dallas	Boot Camp
3	Dallas	Unidentified Workshop
4	Dallas	Boot Camp
5	Dallas	Boot Camp
6	Dallas	Boot Camp
7	Dallas	Workshop
8	Mesquite	Workshop
9	Garland	Boot Camp
10	Mesquite	Unidentified Program
11	Cedar Hill	Workshop
12	Dallas	Workshop
13	Lancaster	Workshop
14	Cedar Hill	Workshop
15	Dallas	Workshop
16	New Beginnings Private School (Dallas County)	Workshop
17	Richardson	Workshop
18	Lancaster	Workshop
19	Dallas	Workshop
20	Cedar Hill	Workshop

Table 2.3 Participant Characteristics: Non-Profit Administrators

Non-Profit Administrator	Training/Educational Experience	Years affiliated with Organization	Services Provided
A	Worked with youth in the church and extended family, WorkSource, and Rio Program	10	Life skills development, mentoring, maintaining healthy relationships
B	Social Services, North Central Texas Council of Governments Committee	N/A	Community appreciation, transition skills, drug and alcohol awareness, developing healthy relationships, bullying, and gang prevention
C	Quality Assurance Manager with Juvenile Department, Investigator for DA's office, and Executive Director of a Charter School	1	Character building, leadership skills, career orientation, child and family guidance, anger management, goal setting, GED program
D	D1- Elementary teacher, licensed chemical dependency and international drug and alcohol counselor, DISD department of Safe and Drug Free Schools	1.5	Life skills, developing a healthy life style, counseling, chemical assessments, psychosocial evaluations, drug counseling, family counseling
	D2-Military, mental health field, JROTC instructor	1.5	
E	Social Work, Americorp	10	Life skills, communication skills anger management, decision making
F	Social Work	1.5	Enrichment skills, anger management, drug and alcohol education, and socialization
G	Teacher, remedial junior college instructor, mentor	4	Truancy prevention, life skills ,and goals setting
H	Program director, social services manager, certified-life coach, director of family services for the city	5	Life coaching, mentoring, career and job skills training, parenting education, and life skills classes
I	Banking industry, mentoring	8	Decision making, anger management, life skills, table etiquette, self-esteem and confidence acquisition
J	Professional Counselor	Less than a year	Counseling session
K	Military	7	Boot camp
L	Education K-12 , school counselor, and a professor at a university	3	Advocate for parents and students, life skills
M	Dallas County Community College	3	GED Program and college transition

Table 2.4 Participant Characteristics: Principals

Principal	District	Years of Experience as a Principal
1	Sunnyvale	5 years
2	Dallas Can	2A-6 years 2B-N/A
3	Dallas	6 years
4	Dallas	N/A
5	Dallas	10+ years
6	Dallas	21 years
7	Dallas	5 years
8	Dallas	N/A
9	Dallas	N/A
10	Richardson	N/A
11	Richardson	14 years
12	Richardson	11 years
13	Richardson	N/A
14	Richardson	N/A
15	Dallas	8 years
16	Dallas	3 years
17	Dallas	12 years
18	Dallas	18A-3 weeks 18B-5 years
19	Dallas	N/A
20	Dallas	N/A
21	Dallas	3 years
22	Garland	7 years

Instrumentation

A semi-structured interview using open-ended questions was used to collect data. The questions allowed for the researcher to build a rapport with the participants and create an environment that was conducive to exploring participant meanings in relation to success. An interview protocol was used, however, based on the participant's response certain impromptu follow-up questions were asked. The following interview protocol was used for judges, principals and nonprofit organizations:

1. What is your specific title and job responsibilities?

2. Describe your background for your current position including your educational experiences, job experiences, or special training.

3. How many years have you been a part of the truancy reduction program?

4. How does your program define student success?

5. What are the goals of the truancy reduction program?

6. What are the major components of your truancy reduction program?

7. Are there any organizations or agencies that you partner with? If yes, what are they and what services do they provide?

8. What is the history and some of the contextual factors involving the creation of the truancy program?

9.   In your opinion, what are characteristics of an effective truancy reduction

           program? Why?

Questions 1, 2, and 3 are general and were designed to build a rapport with the

participant, as well as assess contextual factors that frame the participant's perception of

the program and how success is measured. Questions 5- 9 are designed to examine

judges', non-profit administrators', and principals' perceptions of meaning making

within the organization. By investigating the goals and major components of the

program the researcher could better understand why success is defined a certain way by

the participant. During that process, barriers to defining success among multiple

organizations with multiple stakeholders may be identified. Question 4 is designed to

ascertain the meaning ascribed to success by judges, non-profit administrators, and

principals. Question 4 allowed participants to convey how they perceived success based

on their organizational or institutional goals.

      A separate interview protocol was used for parents. The following are the

questions included on the parent interview protocol:

1.   What district does your child attend?

2.   How long has your child attended that district?

3.   What school districts has your child attended previously?

4.   What is your child's grade level?

5.   How old is your child?

6.   What is the race/ethnicity of your child?

7.   How helpful was the truancy reduction program to your child?

8.   Did the truancy reduction program help your child stay in school?

9.   Did the truancy reduction program improve your child's grades?

10.   What elements of the school district's truancy reduction efforts have been most beneficial for your child? Why?

11.   What elements of the school district's truancy reduction efforts have been ineffective for your child? Why?

12.   Are there any elements that you would like to see added to the district's truancy initiatives? If so, what?

Questions 1 to 6 were designed to provide demographic data and general information about the parent's child in an effort to explore patterns when the data was analyzed. The demographic data includes the child's grade level, age, and race/ethnicity. The general information included the child's school district, length of attendance within the school district, and previous school districts the child attended. Questions 10 to 12 were designed to explore parents' perceptions of meaning making. Questions 7 to 11 were designed to ascertain the meaning ascribed to success by parents. The researcher built a rapport with participants and made the interview format more conversational which allowed the participants to freely discuss the subject matter. Although there was an

interview protocol, each question was not explicitly asked if the participant answered multiple questions in response to one question.

Data Collection

Data was collected from Dallas County Truancy Court judges, parents of truant students who had been referred to the Dallas County Truancy Court, non-profit organizations who provided services to students referred by the Dallas County Truancy Court, and principals from six of the seven districts (Dallas, Garland, Mesquite, Sunnyvale, Richardson, and Texans Can Charter Schools) serviced by the Dallas County Truancy Court. Once participants had scheduled an interview and read and signed the informed consent document, a semi-structured, tape-recorded interview approximately 60 minutes in length was conducted. Two devices were used to record the interview: a standard cassette recorder and a digital recorder. Some interviews were much shorter than 60 minutes due to time constraints and locations. Tape-recorded interviews were necessary with the intention that the researcher did not rely solely on memory or notes and so that nuances in the voice such as words, tone, and pauses were documented. Interviews with judges, principals, and nonprofit organizations primarily took place at the participant's office. Other locations were considered based on the participant's preference. Interviews with parents took place at one of the 5 Dallas County Truancy Court houses or at the locations where workshops were held for Youth

Conversion, Inc., Youth Conflict Resolution, and M.Y. G.I.R.L.S. The previously

discussed interview protocol was used to conduct all interviews. The open-ended

questions contained on the interview protocol allowed the researcher to capture the

individual perspectives of all participants. Once interviews were completed, they were

transcribed and prepared for data analysis.

Qualitative data analysis, including coding, was used to examine the transcribed

interviews. The preliminary exploratory analysis identified all statements related to

success and barriers to having a uniform definition of success. Once the statements were

identified, the statements were divided into relevant and irrelevant information

categories based on whether or not they addressed the initial research questions. The

relevant group statements were then separated into various "meaning units" and were

assigned codes based on the various meanings articulated in the interviews. Through the

process of coding, major themes and patterns were identified and compared within the

four major groups of stakeholders and across the various groups of stakeholders. After

the interviews of the major stakeholders were coded and analyzed, the definition of

success used by various stakeholders were examined, ideas for policy recommendations

were explored, and directions for future research were determined.

Ethical Issues

With respect to the protection of the human subjects, the researcher recieved

approval for this protocol from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University

of Texas at Arlington. In addition, the individual school districts also granted approval

of this research study prior to contacting participants. All participants were given an

informed consent document that contained detailed information about the study. At that

time, participants were allowed to ask questions about the study to gain further clarity

about the research project. Additionally, the researcher took the following steps to

protect the rights of participants: remained objective in regards to participant responses

throughout the interview process, respected privacy, maintained participants'

anonymity, secured all data, and solicited voluntary participation.

<div align="center">Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability</div>

The researcher recognized the importance of reliability and validity in

qualitative research. To address potential reliability issues, the researcher checked the

transcribed interviews to make sure there were no inaccuracies and made sure that

meanings of codes were consistent. To ensure that the meanings of the codes were

consistent, the researcher conducted an initial coding of the interview and followed-up

with an additional blind coding of the interview to compare and resolve any

inconsistencies in the meaning of the codes. According to Creswell (2003), validity is

"based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the

researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account" (Creswell, 2003, p.191).

Validity was ensured through the process of triangulation, specifically member

checking, which allowed the researcher to send a transcription of the interview to

<div align="center">67</div>

participants to verify that the data was accurate and ask any necessary follow-up questions needed for clarification. Validity was also enhanced by rich, thick description of the data and disclosure of the researcher's potential biases. On the issue of generalizability, Creswell (2003) asserts that "particularity rather than generalizability is the hallmark of qualitative research" (Creswell, 2003, 193). Qualitative research does not necessarily strive to generalize the findings of studies to other sites; however, it does strive to provide detailed descriptions of procedures and methods used to conduct the study so that it can be replicated in other sites (Creswell, 2003). This study has provided detailed descriptions of all methods and procedures used to conduct the study.

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

The study will be not be generalizable since it is a case study and each school district has shown that they have unique student populations and contextual situations. Non-profit organizations that participated in the study were not required to serve a specific amount of truant students; therefore, some organizations may have serviced ten while others may have serviced two hundred, which may cause their actual success rate to be distorted and their definitions of success to vary. During the selection process of parent interviewees, an amount of time since the completion of the students' truancy reduction program was not specified. Parents' definition of success may vary depending on the time that has lapsed between now and their child's completion of the truancy reduction program.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter details the findings of semi-structured interviews conducted with:
four judges, twenty parents, thirteen non-profit organizations, twenty-one principals,
and one student services coordinator. To protect their identities, these judges will be
referred to as Judge A, Judge B, Judge C, and Judge D.

Twenty parents receiving services through the Dallas County Truancy Court
participated in the current study. For the remainder of the paper, those parents will be
referred to as Parents numbers one through twenty. Most parents were interviewed
while attending a call back hearing. At the child and the parent's initial meeting with the
judge, the judge typically mandates that certain requirements are met. It is at the call
back hearing that the judge determines whether or not the child has adhered to the court
mandates and if any further programs, assignments, or documentation is required.

Thirteen non-profit organizations contracted to provide services for the Dallas
County Truancy Court participated in the current study. For the remainder of the paper,
these entities will be referred to as organizations "A" through "M". It is important to

note that one administrator was interviewed in each organization; however, most of the administrators had multiple roles and responsibilities within the organization.

Twenty-one principals of schools within five of the seven districts serviced by the Dallas County Truancy Court participated in the current study. Mesquite Independent School District declined to participate and Garland Independent School District only granted access to the student services coordinator to speak on behalf of administrators within the district. For the remainder of the paper, these principals and the student services coordinator will be referred to as principals numbered one through twenty-two.

As data is presented, the following research questions are addressed: 1) What are the challenges faced in defining success when multiple organizations with multiple stakeholders are involved in a decentralized arrangement? 2) How is success defined in truancy reduction programs by school districts, school principals, parents, and judges? 3) Is the definition of success used by schools, districts, and the state the same as the definition of success used by key stakeholders and non-profit organizations that work with truant students? Through the examination of individual participant interview data using the framework of the theory of social constructions, definitions of success can be examined, patterns within and across participant groups will be identified, and challenges faced in defining success within multiple organizations and among multiple stakeholders are explored. Constructions, as stated in the theory section of the

dissertation, refers to the idea that meanings ascribed to objects and terms are a product

of society and individuals' interactions with others rather than something that is

invariant (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Crossley, 2004). Research also suggests that

internal and external factors influence individual's construction of meaning. If the

stakeholder's definition of success is constructed using federal law or some type of

formal institutional policy, then it can be considered an external construction, however,

if the stakeholder's definition of success is constructed by personal experiences, biases,

or beliefs it can be considered an internal construct.

The findings are grouped into themes that emerged from the data and they

include five broad areas that encompass internal and external factors that impact the

definition of success. They include institutional constraints, stakeholder experiences

(personal and professional), definitions of success as end result versus process, problem

identification, and variables at the school level that reduce truancy. During the data

collection process it became clear that student success is a part of the definition of

success for the truancy reduction program and among some stakeholders student

success may serve as a proxy for program success.

Before analyzing the themes that emerged from the data, it is necessary to define

the themes so that the various elements included in each theme are clearly identified and

understood. Institutional constraints are those that impact success and come from a

variety of sources; federal accountability mechanisms and legislation, state legislation,

district policy, school processes, and parents, teachers, students, judges, non-profit administrators, and principals' access to information. School processes includes elements such as attendance reporting and curriculum tracks. The second theme that emerged, stakeholder experience, focuses on the personal and professional experiences of judges, parents, non-profit administrators, and principals and the impact those experiences have on their definition of success in relation to truancy reduction programs. Personal experiences include stakeholders' direct experience with the educational system as a student or parent and stakeholders' experience with truant students. Professional experiences are those that are related to the stakeholders' chosen career path and have the ability to influence how stakeholders define success. Participants in the study came from various professional backgrounds such as law, education and social work. The third theme that emerged is definitions of success as end result versus process which is stakeholders' tendency to define success based on a truant student's completion of the program rather than a continuous process involving monitoring and accountability. The fourth theme that emerged is problem identification which focuses on the idea that success is ascertaining the personal, familial, academic, and social issues that truant students are experiencing so that potential solutions can be explored. Lastly, variables at the school level that reduce truancy emerged and relates to positive variables of schools that do not have issues with truancy such as small class size, games at lunch before school, community school format, lyceum, tailoring

curriculum to each student, and creating a culture of graduation. These positive

variables influence stakeholders' definition of success.

<center>Institutional Constraints-Educational Legislation</center>

Sismondo (1993) indicates that institutions such as the local, state, and national

government do not naturally occur within society, but instead are constructed through

routines and conventions. Institutions construct meaning by creating acceptable values

and norms, producing legislation, and developing sanctions for individuals who fail to

comply with the rules and procedures (Sismondo, 1993). Several participants indicated

that educational legislation constructed the meaning of "success" within truancy

reduction programs. For example, Judge A indicated that the ultimate goal for any child

in the public education system should be graduation, however, Judge A questions the

definition of success within the public education system, specifically, the idea that in

order for a child to be considered successful, they must score proficient levels on the

state-mandated exams. Judge A suggests that:

> [Schools] have gotten away with everybody has to be college ready when they
>
> graduate from high school and we're losing the sight of there's many things out
>
> there that we could be teaching these kids to make them successful, the day they
>
> get out of high school.

Judge A asserts that educational legislation limits the scope of the definition of success.

Due to the requirements outlined in the NCLB legislation, schools must meet adequate

yearly progress and while one of the indicators is the graduation rate, another one of the major indicators is the percentage of students scoring proficient levels on the state-mandated exams. Because of the way the law constructs success, stakeholders such as Judge A must define success based on those indicators so that they can remain in compliance with the law and not receive any sanctions or loss of funding.

Principal #8, who has six years of experience as an educational administrator, also expressed her frustrations with the current accountability system and the impact that state-mandates have on defining student success:

Well ultimately, all student success is evaluated on graduation or high school completion, because that's our existence. That's our purpose, is to make sure students have a sound education. And so, that's our ultimate measure of success. Uh, and those who are able to continue on to higher education, uh, that are career and college ready. You know, it's not enough for them to graduate, but they have to be able to, like our mission says, 'have to be able to be either globally employed or to continue on to higher education.' It's difficult to have an opinion on what I think success is, when the state, through accountability tells me what my success should be, with the number of dropout percentages and the number of – my bottom line is every child should graduate. There's no reason they shouldn't.

According to Principal #8 the challenge that educators face in constructing a definition of success is that some of the state's policies are in conflict with district policies. Principal #8's hope for the future was that:

> The district and the state come together on the number of credits required for graduation. Currently, DISD requires more graduation credit hours than the state does, which means students have to stay in school longer to graduate, which ultimately, affects our graduate rate, which is part of accountability. I'd like to see the state have a common core of principles and an alignment of courses, so when a kid leaves one school in Texas and goes to another school, they don't lose credit hours because they've transferred.

Principal #13 had been a coach for eleven years prior to becoming an administrator and found educational legislation to be restrictive when defining success. As a coach, he was able to get know the kids on a personal level and understand the struggles that they went through; however, Principal #13 stated:

> You try to bring that [the understanding] over to this position, but at the same time, It's pretty black and white as what the state demands. So, applying, you know, what you know and what you want is best for the kid, but specifically, the law says this – you're at this number. There's not a lot of wiggle room.

In contrast, Principal #22 who has one and a half years' experience as an educational administrator and oversees an early college high school, found it very easy

and clear cut to define success using education legislation. She stated that "[if a student is successful] they start coming to school. Well, just like any other district, they're academically successful. They pass from year-to-year. They graduate. The success of a truant student is one who comes to school." When asked if a student had to come to school one hundred percent of the time or just exhibit a reduction in absences to be successful, Principal #22 said:

> That's not really a professional question, that's more of a personal thing. That's subjective. If the law says that you have to be in school every day that school is in session for the entire period that it's in session and you're deliberately not present, then, that's not successful if you are not in school. But, that's my interpretation of that statute. Whether or not a student is successful at that point, you're talking about filing a truancy case. It really doesn't matter what I think personally. Because the person who makes that decision is the one who signs the court order.

Again, educational legislation as an institutional constraint has dictated the definition of success of students within the truancy reduction program by providing strict guidelines of what is deemed successful and not successful regardless of individual student circumstances or contextual factors. Educational legislation has provided a template with guidelines and sanctions for defining student success, thereby aiding individuals in the process of meaning making. Marx and Engels (1888) would suggest that the

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legislation was created and implemented by the affluent to continue the domination over the working class, thus giving the affluent the power to control the definition of terms such as "success". Marx and Engels (1888) would further suggest that the only way to create a dialogue and change the definition of success to be more inclusive of all classes would be to acknowledge the existing class structures and to question the taken for granted realities.

<center>Institutional Constraints- School Processes</center>

Another institutional constraint that impacted the definition of success for participants was school processes. School processes included inaccurate attendance reporting, the school environment, and state and district mandated curriculum tracks. Also, within this category the school processes at work within magnet schools, single-sex academies, and early college high schools will be explored since those schools did not experience any issues with truancy, thereby influencing participants' definitions of success in relation to truancy reduction programs. Parents were the primary stakeholders that had a difficult time defining success due to the school's inaccurate attendance reporting. For example, it was difficult for the parent of a fifteen year old biracial girl that had recently moved from California to define success because she felt that the truancy case filed against her daughter was unjust and the result of the school's poor attendance reporting. The parent explained that:

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It wasn't really her that was missing school. You see, that's the whole thing that nobody wanted to listen to, in court or here. The teachers were marking her absent because she was in the wrong class. They changed her schedule and didn't let her know they changed the schedule. So, they were just marking her absent really. And then they made us come here and pay money and all kinds of other stuff.

Upon further investigation and questioning of her child, the parent was able to ascertain that teachers were either not calling roll or having students sign in as they walked into the classroom or the teachers were having students take attendance. Initially when the parent became aware of the incorrect documentation of her daughter's attendance, she immediately contacted the school for assistance in addressing the issue. As stated previously, the parent is originally from California so she was not aware of the specific attendance policies in Texas and sought support from the school. The school basically sent her from one person to another without providing any real assistance. The parent said that the person that helped her the most was the school secretary. The parent was not able to provide a definition of success in relation to the truancy reduction program because according to her there was never a problem with her daughter's attendance.

The parent of a fourteen year old African American boy also attributed her son's case before the Dallas County Truancy Court to inconsistency in the school's

attendance reporting, and as a result, was unable to define success in relation to the truancy reduction program. Her son was assigned to in-school suspension (ISS) for fighting. While he was on campus in ISS, he was still marked absent in his regular classes. The parent said that the school was supposed to correct the inaccuracies in his attendance, but they never followed through.

The parent of a fifteen year old Hispanic boy explained that her child is considered to be truant because he is continuously late to class. He's typically late because he goes to the restroom or decides to walk someone else to class. Upon entering the classroom, teachers sign his attendance reporting sheets, but still count him absent. Once her son reaches a certain amount of tardies, the parent indicated that her child would be placed in in school suspension (ISS). Once he is in ISS, sometimes he is marked as being absent from classes even though he is still on the school premises. These institutional practices at the school hindered the parent's ability to define success in relation to the truancy reduction program. The parents' continual interactions with stakeholders within the education process (i.e. principals, counselors, attendance clerks, etc.) impacted their ability to define the term success. While a clear definition of success in relation to the truancy reduction program did not emerge from parents, the interview data still supports the social constructionist view that factors such as institutional school processes can influence and ultimately hinder the process of meaning making (Sismondo, 1993; Hosltein & Gubrium, 2008).

Similar to the parents, the executive director of a non-profit organization was also concerned about school institutional processes, namely attendance reporting, and the impact that had on student success and ultimately the success of the truancy reduction program. The administrator indicated that several students who shared their stories with her revealed that their attendance was tied to the teacher's classroom management or lack thereof. The administrator stated:

I would like to see [schools] not use the attendance as a weapon of management. I hear several students share in their truancy stories that they are truant because of the relationship with their teacher, meaning that the teacher put them out and marked them absent. And those absences added up to be truant. And so that became a component for that child to end up in the court system because of a behavioral issue with a teacher or even classroom management with a teacher. Because in some instances it's not even the parents or the children's issue of truancy, it's actually the school's issue. More and more we are having teachers that are using the attendance piece to be their discipline mechanism in the classroom.

Several parents also noted that the school environment impacted the success of their child and the poor institutional practices made it difficult for the parents to define success. For example, the parent of a fifteen year old biracial girl stated that the school environment was detrimental to her child's academic success. The parent stated:

Some of the teachers are racist. The majority of the kids are Black and the

Mexican kids get treated way different. I mean, you see the favoritism all the

way with kids there. I mean, Black kids getting all the favoritism and the

Mexican kids abused. There's about thirty Mexicans in that school…One

teacher told my daughter, 'You Mexicans shouldn't be coming in here. They

should make it an all Black school.

The instance that the parent described is not just specific to teachers; she argues that it is

also a common occurrence at the administrative level. The parent went on to describe

her encounters with the school principal:

She's always doing something else. Like one day when I went in there to fix her

thing – her record, I stood in there from 11:00 until 1:00 for somebody to see.

And she was still ignoring me, going past me, taking other parents in which

were Black parents and I'm sitting in the chair waiting. So, it's just like, you

know, it's the favoritism that goes on in that school.

The parent indicated that she was currently trying to move into another district so that

her daughter could attend a school with a more diverse mixture of students and a staff

and administration that treated all kids equally.

The parent of a fifteen year old biracial boy who is a severe asthmatic also felt

that the school environment prohibited her from constructing a clear definition of

success and went on to explain a situation that had occurred at school after he had a minor flair up:

> When we first got to [his school], he was pulled from class and searched because they thought that he was on drugs [after minor flair ups he is typically hyper]. So, I was really upset about that and it's just instances like that that just…To the point you know to where it's made me seriously think about sending him to stay with his father because he lives in [another] district. So, I'm going back and forth trying to figure out what's the best solution for this.

The parent also stated that she was considering a form of home school known as a "virtual academy." Additionally, the parent stated that she was distressed because her son came home daily and said that he almost got into a fight. The classes at his school are overcrowded and the students are unruly. The parent said that she was constantly hearing stories:

> …about people stepping on people's shoes. There's conflict because they are getting bumped. You know it's crazy. The class is just too crowded. I don't think they [the school] has the resources to break down those classes. I think that if they were able to create smaller classes, like maybe twenty-five, twenty-six kids in class, then maybe they would be more hands on. They would be more

equipped to deal with them. You know certain students that they perceive as lacking.

Several parents indicated that the lack of institutional support from the school clouded their construction of the definition of success. For example, the parent of a fourteen year old African American boy has searched for mentoring programs within her community since the school her son attends does not provide mentoring programs; however, she has not been successful in locating that resource. She was informed by an employee of the Dallas police department that her son would have to be a criminal to get that type of help.

The parent did not feel that the school was providing the necessary support for her child to be successful. When she went up to the school to investigate her child's attendance records, she was told by an administrative assistant that she could not stop what she was doing to help the parent. She immediately took her concerns to the school principal and she was provided with the proper information. The parent continues to reach out to the school by contacting teachers to schedule conferences and by contacting the counselor to see what resources are available for her child. The entire process has been frustrating for the parent. She stated that:

As a parent, you see where your child is going – another direction before they actually get to that full direction. And [the school] is not helping…I have

requested some conferences with teachers, but not one has responded to me…I

actually call up there in tears. And I was like, 'Do ya'll not care about the kids?'

You know…I know most parents may not be up there, but here I am, a

concerned parent, trying to see what's going on with my child and I cannot get

one teacher to call me back. And I told them…I said, 'I'm going to take it to a

higher level. I'm going to DISD.' And that's when I got a conference with the

teacher.

She also had a meeting with the school counselor. During that meeting, it was

recommended that the parent take her son to Metrocare, a non-profit organization that

assists people with mental illness, developmental disabilities, and severe emotional

problems. The counselor stated that they could give him some type of medicine to calm

him down. The parent was very adamant about the fact that medicine would not solve

the problem. She believed her son could benefit from school programs such as

mentoring and counseling to address the issues that her son was dealing with.

The parent of a fifteen year old severe asthmatic also believed that there was a

lack of support from the school because the school failed to acknowledge that her son

has a medical condition, severe asthma, and the school's attendance policies do not

accommodate for that making it difficult for her to define success in relation to the

truancy reduction program. The parent stated that:

He is missing school because when his asthma flairs he has to stay home. I can't send him to school. You know you got so many kids that smell like smoke. He can't be around cigarette smoke right now, any kind of smoke. He can't be around heavy perfume. He can't be around an environment where he can't get fresh air. So it wouldn't do me any good to send him to school, knowing that I would have to pay for it later because he's going to have to have a hospital stay.

In the previous district her son attended, they recognized that he was a severe asthmatic and took that into consideration when evaluating his attendance records. In the current district, they are requiring that the parent call the attendance office the morning that her son will be absent and provide a doctor's note upon his return to school. The parent is used to providing a handwritten note justifying her child's absence and is still adjusting to this new procedure. She cited this as the main reason for the filing of the truancy court case. The parent also felt that having to provide a doctor's note every time that her son's asthma flared up was unreasonable. This is a condition that she has been handling since she was two so there was no reason that she needs to take him to the doctor because she knows how to handle the situation. She also noted that financially she did not have the means to do that. During the parent's court appearance, the judge informed her about the 504 program. Up till that point, she had never heard of the program or been informed by her son's school. The 504 program refers to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the American disabilities act which

prohibits excluding individuals with disabilities from participating in federally funded programs or activities including elementary and secondary schooling. Her son would qualify for assistance.

Based on parent reports, Judge B stated that procedures at schools are detrimental to student success and as a result a hindrance to defining success within truancy reduction programs. Judge B argues that schools needed to do a better job of identifying special needs that may impede student learning. He added that parents are coming from other districts or states and indicated that their children were not receiving the proper testing, and as a result, their children are not in the proper program to address behavioral, emotional, social, and/or academic issues.

Participants' also suggested that the traditional academic track and college were not for every student and challenged the state and the school's traditional measure of success. This element within the school processes category was unique in that several participants from all stakeholder groups acknowledged that the academic tracks mandated by the state and implemented by school districts influenced their constructions of the definition of success in relation to the truancy reduction programs. For example, Judge A recommends the development of trade/vocational programs within school districts to assist students in developing practical work skills if they do not wish to attend college. In the school district that Judge A services, they have a welding program that allows students to graduate from high school with a classification

as certified welders. Judge A acknowledges the potential benefits of such vocational programs and states that:

> [Judge A] wishes that we could have a trade component of high school. I don't think that everybody fits into the, 'I got to take the state test and I've got to be able to do well on this state test to be successful.' I got to be honest with you. When I take my car to be repaired, I don't care if that person passed an English test. I really don't. I care about, 'Can he fix my car.' And if he can fix my car, I'm going to pay him money.

The parent of two African American girls, a fourteen and seventeen year old, has high expectations for both of her daughters and discussed their future career aspirations. At one time, both of her daughters wanted to be veterinarians, but now, her younger daughter wants to be a teacher. Part of the struggle that the parent has with her daughters and nurturing their success in school is that they are not receiving the proper services in school. She went on to explain that initially, her older daughter was diagnosed as being borderline ADHD and because of that the school said that there was nothing that they could do. She was tested every year to determine why she was struggling so much. Just last year, after about nine years of testing, she was finally diagnosed as being dyslexic. At the time of the interview, her older daughter had just been kicked out from her current high school because of truancy.

The parent stated that her daughter did not excel in the traditional school settings provided in DISD, however, her daughter did excel in specialized schools such as Richardson Independent School District's Evolution Academy. The parent explained that:

> She [her older daughter] was actually learning things. She would come home and do homework and things I wasn't seeing when she was going to DISD. She would bring homework home and do reading. She came in my room and asked me questions and be on the computer. She'd actually work and do things and do projects. I remember, I cannot get this out of her when she was in DISD…[the classes are] more focused , the teacher can talk to you. You know, she's easily distracted. That's the problem.

The parent also stressed that her daughter strongly disliked the traditional school setting:

> [Her daughter stated that] she doesn't care if they lock her up. She said maybe she'll learn something while she's there…They spend too much time worrying about teaching them how to pass the test instead of teaching you things you actually need in life. Maybe the teachers there will be better than those at DISD.

Her daughter is unable to attend the Evolution Academy because they have already filled their allotted number of slots.

The parent believes that the traditional school setting may be stifling the success of her daughters. The parent describes success as an evolutionary process:

> Being in school in general and being able to come home and tell me what you learned today [is success]. Because I tell my kids, 'You should learn something new every day, because that's the growing process. And as we grow, no matter how old we get we should learn something new every day.' And I would share with them, what I learned new, for that day. So, I expect them to have learned something new. Not that same old, same old, you know…What did they learn in math? Is there a new method or something that you need to teach me? What did you learn in English? And my kids, they just get in the car and sit there and look at me. They learn more stuff in gym than they do in academic classes…that's strange to me.

The parent wants the school to inspire and her daughters to aim high and reach their full potential, whether it is pursuing careers in teaching, medical, or political fields. She has high expectations for her daughters and she would like that to be reinforced at school.

<center>Institutional Constraints-Traditional Curriculum</center>

The parent of a sixteen year old Caucasian female who attended magnet schools during her elementary, middle, and high school years suggested that the entire educational system was broken. He stated that:

Not all kids are created equal. Not all kids are geared towards academics. Some kids are hands on. Working on cars; being a plumber – whatever on the trades, that type of thing. Those kids are not going to do well in academics. They don't care. They're not caring less – English, math, they're done with all that. That's why a lot of kids are cutting classes. That's why they're skipping school or quitting school. There's no future in it. They know they're going to fail. Why even bother? Back in the day, schools did have [it] to where you could – that was your major – it's in the trades. If you were getting the academics, you move on in that. They've [schools] have cut out all of the trades. Now, it's all pigeon-holed down that one thing. You either do this or…Now they're trying to force everybody to do good to go to college. Well, not everybody is geared for college. I'm sorry that just isn't going to work.

The parent indicated that the school provided no intervention strategies and put the responsibility on his daughter to come up with ideas that might work for her. At a minimum success meant to graduate from high school; however, the parent acknowledged that not every student would be successful on an academic track; therefore, the schools should offer more vocational programs.

Organization "F" also acknowledges that college will not be the path for every student. The administrator stated:

There are people who are interested in specific kinds of thing that don't require going college. There are kids who do work better with their hands. They do have skills that can be developed in other kinds things than maybe academics.

The administrator said that part of the aim of the program is to ascertain student goals and aspirations and then have students identify the necessary steps to meet those goals, whether it be a four year university or some type of vocational training program. The administrator indicated that the school's refusal to make the curriculum more applicable and relevant to student's lives is impacting the success of students. The administrator stated:

I'd like to see them get rid of the archaic curriculum that we are holding on to. And by archaic, I mean these twenty-one credits of science, math, history, and economics. You know, whatever it is, it's so archaic, you're losing children. And you want to know why? Because you're talking to them about economics and Texas History, and who really cares? Really…But these kids, they don't care. That's the thing that I think the school districts all need to completely revamp, re-haul, out with the old, in with the new, just get with a new program because we are centuries later and we just need to be teaching our kids differently, with life skills, personal growth and development, meeting them where they are.

The administrator acknowledge the presence of vocational/trade tracks and magnet schools; however, based on her personal experience working within those institutions and students' reports, the schools that claim to offer those programs still require the core curriculum and only minimally implement the various tracks. The administrator attributes the "broken" educational system for the persistence of truancy.

Principal #8, who has six years of experience in educational administration acknowledged that:

We live in a society of migrant workers and we know that our people move around according to where the jobs are. So instead of the traditional curriculum and school setting, our schools should facilitate that. I think we should have a sliding schedule of course offerings, whether it be on-line, whether it be virtual school or whether it be kids come in and they can start early and go half a day or come half a day and stay late. But, it should be set up for the convenience of the students, especially when we know the economics is going to dictate their attendance. And so, we have to be mindful of that.

Similarly, Principal #13, who has over ten years of experience in the field of education recognized that not all students want to pursue college and are interested in sitting in a math or English class for four years. The students' interests lie elsewhere. According to Principal #13, more career and technology programs could assist with

decreasing the occurrence of truancy because students are involved in something that they want to do. When Principal #13 was asked to define success, he said:

> I think a kid showing up and being engaged and actually wanting to be here. I think we talk too much about grades and test and everything. The kid wanting to be here; the kid showing up and participating.

To reach that level of success, Principal #13 suggested offering more technical classes. Principal #13 expounded on the importance of reevaluating the course offerings and requirements:

> I think that if you have something to work towards or something that's going to you know – I think there's a disconnect between some kids and content in classes. I think some kids look at Algebra II for example, 'I'm never going to use this.' They look at – I don't know, history, social studies, uh. American history and say, you know, 'It's good to know, but I'm never going to use this. I want to be, you know, whatever it is.' So, if you had something that was more of an interest inventory or just something that they could make a career out of and they leave high school with their certification. Then, it's a career and I think they would want to be here and work toward that.

Institutional Constraints- Access to Information

The lack of information across organizational levels limited the meanings that stakeholders could ascribe to the term "success" in relation to truancy reduction programs. Judge A identifies graduation as the "true element of success", he also notes that it's one of the success standards that Judges cannot confirm as students may not appear before the judge again. Judge A asserts that:

> The only real ability [judges] have is, do we ever see that child again. So, I guess, kind of from our own instinct is, success is if I see a child once and I never see him again, it's success. But, that's not really something you can tell because that child could have moved. That child could have – there's a whole lot of things that could have occurred with why you didn't see him.

Judges at the Dallas County Truancy Court do not have access to records indicating whether or not a student that has received services from the Court graduated high school, making it very difficult to track that definition of success. Adding more complexity to the definition of success, Judge A also revealed that even if a child returned to his court room, he would not automatically render that child unsuccessful. If students return to his courtroom with fewer unexcused absences and better grades, that can be considered a success because the child is moving torward to the ultimate goal of graduating.

Judge B's definition of success was also limited based on his access to information. Judge B stated that:

> If a student has been very successful, I won't see the student again, because when they come for a review, they don't come into the courtroom. They don't have to if they've had no problem with attendance. They have violated no aspects of the court order…I'll see some of those who come back who have not done what is required. It's going to be a smaller number so I know right away that other students must have been pretty successful, complied with the order, must be getting to school, and doing their assigned work.

While reduction of absences and improvement of grades are two measures of success, Judge B also based success on other issues that were expressed at their initial hearing. For example, if at the initial hearing the student's parent indicated that the student was coming in late from school, the occurrence of the issue should have decreased or been completely eliminated at the time of the review hearing.

Institutional Constraints-Professional/Personal Experience

Participants also indicated that their experiences within the educational field aided in their construction of the term "success" in relation to truancy reduction programs. When asked to describe his background for his current position including but not limited to his educational experiences, job experiences, or special training, Judge A replied that he would "have to go back to elementary school, junior high, and high

school". He stated that he never missed a day of school from first through twelfth grade and this is one reason why he is so passionate about his job as a truancy court judge. For him, growing up, he knew that if he "didn't go to school, [he wasn't] going to get anywhere". He saw education as his "ticket out of the situation". He noted that it was not a bad situation, but that his family did not have a lot of money.

> Judge A saw the elements to defining success as multifaceted, stating that:
> Success is actually determined in numerous different ways. Obviously, first and foremost, do they graduate from high school? … If they graduate from high school, then that is our true element of success. I like to actually go a little bit further because I think that's our baseline. What I would prefer is that through high school, they've also have understood the need to get further education. Whether it be a trade school; whether it be junior college; whether it be a four year university, to continue learning. Because the more their education and the more degrees they can actually obtain, the better their potential for earning capacity.

For Judge A, the definition of success that he uses to evaluate his work is not one mandated by state legislators. It is a definition developed out of his personal experience and the value he places on education as a tool for economic self-sufficiency. Thus for Judge A, success means graduating from high school and continuing on to further education, whether it be a four-year university or a trade school to earn some

type of professional certification. In addition to secondary and post-secondary education, Judge A defines success as the ability of an individual to contribute to society's economy and support themself and their family economically.

The parent of a seventeen year old Caucasian girl's definition of success was formed by his own personal experience as a high school dropout and his perception that the educational system was broken.

When asked to define success, Parent #17 said:

Not going to court…because I know if she attends class, by virtue of just being there, she would probably pass. I just want her to get a high school diploma. I would like for her [to go beyond that], but if she can't even get through high school, I don't see her getting anywhere else. I know I may be somewhat of an exception. I was a high school dropout. I went in to the Navy at the age of 17. I got my GED then I did get a little bit of college. A little bit of tech school. I did get a diploma from tech school. But, I was fortunate enough to get into the basic field of electronics and I worked my way up. Now, I'm a design engineer. But, I don't have a college degree.

Principal #11 works at a high school in the Richardson Independent School District (RISD) and reminisced about his high school experience. He stated that he went to a high school in a small town where truancy was not an issue. Students knew that you went to school; there were no options. Principal #11 has earned a bachelor's degree, a

master's degree, and has accumulated several additional hours; however, he stated that nothing in his undergraduate or administrative training has helped him with truancy. It is not something they addressed in any of his educational training.

Principal #12 works at a high school in the Richardson Independent School District. She has eleven years of experience. Her job entails working with twelfth grade students, facilitating the enrollment and withdrawal process, and managing dropout prevention. Principal #12 attributes her effectiveness in working with at-risk students, specifically truant students and potential high school dropouts to her experience as a classroom teacher and in the attendance office. She said that:

> Coming from the classroom and working with predominantly minority students, I think that helped. Based on our dropout rate and our attendance rate sometimes those high frequency individuals are students who look like me.

Research regarding the phenomenon of social constructions indicates that individuals' interactions with institutions shape how they construct meanings to ascribe to different terms and ideas (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Crossley, 2004).

Institutional Constraints-Problem Identification

Stakeholders constructed a definition of success based on whether or not they were able to identify the issue(s) that was keeping the student from attending school.The administrator of Organization "A" stated that she mainly defined success

within the program as identifying the problem that is keeping the student from attending school and students leaving more informed about the resources available to them. The administrator stated that:

> I've learned that they don't wake up in the morning and say, 'Hey, I want to drop out of school or I don't want to go to school.' So, I think, me listening to them, finding out what's their problem and then give them a solution [is success].

For example, there are a lot of teenage mothers that do not know the resources that are available to them. Through the program, the administrator has the opportunity to inform program participants of programs available to them that can provide childcare so they do not have to miss school to stay at home with their child. Some of the resources that children are lacking are needed to meet their basic needs. At times, students may not have access to water, electricity, food, or shelter. The program also seeks to provide information for resources pertaining to those basic needs. The administrator went on to explain that:

> The resources help because a lot of the times they go back and tell their parents the resources that are out there. And it even makes the kid feel needed and feel important because it's like, 'I'm able to go back and tell my mom, we can fix the problem.' Especially when I deal with minority kids such as my Hispanics. A lot of their parents have immigration problems. Well, we have lawyers that we team

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up with that we say, 'Hey give this card to your mom.' [Tell them that we sent

you]…Sometimes I have a kid that is hungry and don't know the different types

of assistance that they can get – food banks. There are some kids that don't

know about food stamps. We tell them about the system. And it makes them feel

good and then they'll call back and they'll say, 'You know what…I appreciate

you…My mom is so happy.' You know, and so I think the resources, it helps a

lot for our program.

Since success within the program is based on the identification of a problem and the

acquisition of knowledge regarding available resources, success is tracked using follow-

up calls to parents to assess how the student is doing in school.

Similar to the administrator of Organization "A", the administrator of

Organization "E" who has a degree in social work stated that the main goal of the

program was to identify the reason why the student does not want to go to school and to

make sure that the issue(s) is addressed and the student's needs are fulfilled. Thus

problem identification involves identifying the failing partner.

When asked to define success, the administrator indicated that the primary factor that

defined success was attendance:

"I just want to make sure that they're still in school. That's the main question I

ask, 'Are they still attending classes?' 'Have they been truant anymore? Are

they going to school?' Because that's the bottom line for truancy; they just want

to know if they're attending school."

In order for the student to be successful the problem must be identified.

The administrator of Organization "L" had a unique perspective because she had

experience in education K-12, as a school counselor, and as a university professor. The

entire premise of the programs within Organization "L" is that the parent, the student,

and the school have a partnership. So, as the core foundation of the program, the

partnership is dismantled and examined in an effort to determine which partner is

failing. Once the failing partner is identified, the administrator stated that she builds a

foundation around the failing partner. When asked to clarify and specifically delineate

the characteristics of a failing partner, the administrator explained:

"The student has a responsibility to go to school and learn; to go to class on

time; to complete his or her assignments; to go to tutoring, if he or she needs

help and pass their grades. If a child brings a report card in and it's failing, we'll

look at why the child is failing. Why is this child failing? Why is this child

having an attendance problem? If the child is skipping, then we can identify that

that partner is failing. If the parent is not checking the child's attendance, if the

parent does not have conferences, if the parent does not know about the child's

report card on his or her own or grade status. If the parent does not turn in the

parental notes or check to see if the student has turned it in, we know that

partner is failing. If the school is not willing to work with the parent or the child,

not offer them tutoring, or offer them tutoring but fail to have parent

conferences, fail to contact the parent, just let the automated system call the

parent when the child is skipping and never make a phone call to the parent.

Never reach out to the parent to find out what's going on with this child. Never

send this child or refer this child to SST or student support team or some type of

intervention group in the school. Never refer this child to a counselor. If their

teacher is not taking measures beyond just grading the paper and just being the

teacher, then the school is failing. So, we look at what partner is failing in the

relationship."

The administrator stated that if the student is identified as the failing partner, the

students will be placed on a behavior contract if the behavior persists. However,

initially, students will examine and create their own options and then they will sign and

commit to the options that they have chosen. The students have option" A": to go to

class on time or option "B": to not go to class on time. In addition to identifying their

options, students explore the consequences of their options. Students typically

implement their chosen options within the first week of the program; at that point, there

are usually no attendance problems. The administrator stated that students are required

to bring attendance reports to each session of the program as an added accountability

piece.

If the parent has been identified as the failing partner, the administrator facilitates a parent focused program which emphasizes the difference between a proactive and a reactive parent. The goal is to challenge parents to become proactive and resolve minor issues before they become a situation or some type of crisis. Parents are provided with the appropriate resources to conduct an effective parent conference. If the school has been identified as the missing link the parent is required to arrange two parent conferences and request that the teacher fill out a form that provides the parent, the student, and the facilitator with their perspective. The form is designed to hold the school accountable and to determine if there are interventions that the teacher is currently using. One of the issues that the administrator has noticed within the school system is discrepancies in attendance reporting due to behavior issues, meaning the teacher put the child out of the classroom due to disruptive behavior and marked the student absent.

Institutional Constraints-Success as Program Completion versus Success as a Process

Some participants simply defined success as program completion because that was the only variable that they were able to measure due to time, resources, and informational constraints. For example, when asked to define success, Administrator "H" said:

> Completing eight hours at this stage [is the definition of success]. I wish it was
> something more than that. I wish I could get to the level where we [Organization

"H"] are actually, you know, consistently following with them; that we're able to see them through their years of high school. To actually see them set some goals and then actually reach their goals and then graduate from high school and go on to college, if that's their desire. Which, I honestly hope that it is. But, um that's what I'm shooting for, but again I'm one person. So, my success measure now is that they complete at least that eight hours that they started.

When asked to define success, Administrator "J" gave a simple explanation: "if the student and the parent arrive on time and if they are engaged in therapy [that is success]."At that point the administrator can inform the judge that the student has met the requirements of the truancy court.

When asked to define success, the administrator stated:

Well, now, when they finish this program, they get a certificate. Okay. They take that certificate back to court and I keep up with my own numbers, for the recidivism part of it. And the courts keep up with theirs. Now, the numbers that they have, I don't know. My numbers right now, for my recidivism of kids that don't come back to the program is probably around, I'm going to say, seventy percent and that's give or take a little bit because some kids won't come back even if they do reoffend they just go to the next step as adults.

Administrator "K" also indicated that program completion was the only viable way to define success. He clarified his comments be stating that:

[The only way] I know they've [the students] have been successful is through

the program. Now, once they [the student] leave the program, I know nothing

else about that kid. I don't do that [track students] because I probably run about

one hundred and fifty kids through here a week. So, keeping up with those guys,

I'd lose my mind, trying to figure out if they've finished high school or not.

Like Administrator "K", Administrator "B" also defined success as program

completion. The administrator explicitly stated that:

We define student success by successfully completing the program components

we outline for them [in the time frame outlined]…We also define it by avoiding

furthering into the criminal justice system. So, from being in contempt of court;

successfully completing their court order; successfully completing the terms of

their probation.

In contrast, some participants defined success as a process, meaning the

definition of success was not static, but forever changing which supports Blumer's

(1969) view of the processes of meaning making as static. Administrator 1 within

Organization "D" who has extensive training in drug and addiction counseling suggests

that individuals outside of the rehabilitation process have misperceptions of what

constitutes success. Administrator 1 explained that "a lot of our parents [and

administrators] misinterpret the whole idea of going to the hospital. They think it's a

one stop shop and that's it. You know, they're cured and they're really not."

Administrator 2 within Organization "D" who has experience in the military and working with individuals in halfway houses expounded on defining success and the idea of progress:

> One of the things that we have to use with the parents when we start talking about treatment… [is the concept of an individual living with diabetes]. They [the students] have to figure out if they are diabetic, number one. And then they have to start to figure out how to live with being a diabetic. You know watching their insulin and watching their sugar. You know, so that's kind of what we use with the parents, telling them that first of all, you have to figure out if they are using drugs. What drugs? You know, and then they start living with the addiction. They have to get detoxed in a residential [facility] and then learn to live with that addiction for the rest of their life.

Acknowledging that truancy is a process that is impacted by a number of variables, including drug addiction, nonprofit organizations define success within the context of resolving these various variables, however, institutional constraints such as the court's and school's failure to consider these obstacles. To ensure that students keep making positive strides and progress, Organization "D" offers a continuum of care. The continuum of care offers support and resources to students and families so that they can make a smooth transition back into their daily lives while battling addiction. Administrator 2 described the rationale behind the continuum of care program:

So, the kids are coming out and nobody's there to catch them. So, what we're

trying to do is to develop a safety net to say, 'Come on in. We'll take you on.'

Some of them end up going to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings and

Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings because they want that after care, but

there is no place to give it to them. Sometimes they charge them so outrageously

over-priced that, 'Come on man, those kids can't afford it. Okay, so that's where

we come back in.

The program that the administrator 1 facilitates is designed to impact young ladies'

lives and let them know that there is no such thing as failure. The administrator

explained that:

Just because they [the ladies that attend the program] have experiences different,

you can call it, you know, triumph or tragedy or whatever in life that you could

still go forward. It's believing in yourself, loving yourself, knowing your self-

worth and then, building on their self-esteem, and their confidence. And letting

them know that there's a method – a different pathway they can take in order to

become successful women of today.

The administrator affiliated with Organization "L" who has experience in K-12

education, school counseling, and as a professor at a university for teacher education

also explained success as a process and indicated that three variables were used to

define success: attendance, grades, and behavior. In regards to the measurement of those variables, the administrator expounded:

> Every child is different. I know that just from teaching. And that's why you have to have individual interventions. They don't work for every student. So, depending on when they walk through the door. If I had a student that was absent twenty-some days. I'm seeing this student's attendance is a major problem and I need to see major turnaround. In other words, I've had cases where they've had twenty absences and if they only end up with two or three tardies, I consider that a success.

The administrator also explained different levels of student success:

> If I had a student who doesn't have absenteeism as a problem, just forgot to turn in their notes. And if I see that a student is out sick and I see excused , excused, excused. Then, I'd say, 'Um, parent and the student, one or the other is turning in these notes. And I'd consider that as successful. If I have a student walk through the door and he or she is failing three subjects, missing thirty days of absences, I'm looking at not only attendance, but I want to see improvement in academics. And so, if I see an improvement in both – generally, if they attend, the grades will go up. Because they're sitting in that desk and they're learning. They also have to go to tutoring. So, I also have to see evidence of effort that

I'm going to tutoring. And if I see those areas of improvement, then, I consider

that child to be successful.

The administrator elucidated another level of success:

If it's behavior – if the child is getting put out of class, going to alternative

school, then I look at, 'When was the last time you went to alternative school

and how long has it been since you've gotten an office referral for behavior.'

And if I don't see any in that six weeks period, then I will deem that that child is

a success.

Principal #5 was not able to provides another example of defining success as a

process rather than an end result. He stated:

Sometimes, you can't put a definition on it. What works for one student, may

not work for the next one, but if I can get them engaged in school again –

interested in school and interested in learning, because lifelong learning is

important to me. And so, success is different for each kid. And so, trying to

define it for and – and put it in the framework of the cookie-cutter approach

doesn't work because kids are different. And so, what we try to do is look at a

kid's personal graduation plan. We look at other things that may affect a kid's

readiness – we call it school readiness – to make sure that we have a plan – an

exit plan for them. So they can go off into their future whatever their endeavors

may be. Whether its college or whether it's getting a job or going to the military.

Principal #16 who has over a decade of experience in the educational field also indicated that success was a continual process of improvement. He stated:

> Growth, students grow. Of course, the state answer would be to pass, if you're in the eleventh or twelfth grade, the state answer would be to successfully, pass all state assessments. So, that's any, so it's not just eleventh, but you know, eleventh and twelfth is TAKS and the rest of the babies are STAAR; to successfully pass the TAKS and the STAAR; all the state assessments, as well as, to pass all your classes. You want to see growth in respect to attendance and in respect to tardies.

Principal #16 clarified his definition of success by stating any growth would be seen as improvement, but that he would not use the word success, but he would know the student was headed in the right direction. To further clarify, Principal #16 stated "success, I mean – I don't want to play on words, but success is – my definition is being able to successfully graduate from high school."

When asked to define success, Principal #17 also defined it as a process by stating:

> I see success in a student and I'm just talking about how they grow from [when] I first see them in the ninth grade maybe all the way up until they get to the twelfth grade. The one thing that I see is that maturity level, understanding the

rules, being able to follow, being able to adapt. Our students come from a

background – they don't have much. So the trust is really not there with a lot of

people, as far as you know, them going out somewhere else or someone coming

in. You really have to earn that. And so, when I see a successful student – a

student who has been able to adapt, been able to trust, been able to display some

leadership, also being able to mentor some of the younger students in some of

the positive things they've been taught. Set aside being able to graduate and

move on to some of the career opportunities or college opportunities; whatever

their goal, seeing them meet their goal. Meet their goal is how I see success in a

student.

<div align="center">Variables at the School Level that Reduce Truancy</div>

Magnet schools, single-sex academies, and early college high school

principals indicated that truancy was not an issue at their school, therefore, they did not

define success in relation to truancy reduction programs, but instead defined success

more generally. Principal #1 who has five years of experience in educational

administration explained that truancy was not an issue within the district and that on

average he only filed one truancy case a year. Principal #1 stated that he believes that

there are two reasons that the district is so successful, he stated:

One has no doing on my part at all. So, one is just the parents and the

community. Um, it is an affluent community. The parents value education and

so they want their students here. They want their children here and they make

them come to school. They make them toe the line. That makes my job easier, in

a sense. Two, I think the students enjoy coming to school here. There's not - we

don't have a whole lot of problems; a whole lot of things that would cause a

student not to want to be here. It's a safe place. It's a fun place. We do a lot of

things on campus to try to make it fun for them.

Principal #1 provided an example. He described the cafeteria as a "Peach Pit,"

which was a popular hangout spot in a fictional television series in the nineties. During

lunch, the students are not only eating lunch, but they're also playing games, such as,

ping pong and foosball. In fact, Principal #1 said that students arrived early to school

just to play before school starts. In addition to the games during lunch, Principal #1

stated that there were activity periods. During the thirty minute activity periods,

students are allowed to pick what they want to do.

Principal #4 who has been in the field of education for fifteen years also

indicated that truancy was not an issue at the school. At the time of this interview the

magnet high school had a total of three hundred and eighty-six students enrolled.

Principal #4 described the student population as diverse. Principal #4 explained that

truancy was not a major issue and she explained why:

Well, first of all, our course work is rigorous. So, I think that even in the course

work that we present to our students, when they come in, my freshmen take

college courses. So, everything that they do is either Pre-AP or AP and we're

also on a block schedule. So, if you miss one day, that's like missing a week of

school. It's a lot of information. And so, I think the amount of information that

they receive and the rigor, it's really difficult to sort of catch up once you begin

to miss school.

In addition to the rigorous course work, Principal #4 stated that since the school is small

personal relationships are built that keep students wanting to come to school. When a

student does not attend teachers will immediately call home to see what's going on with

the student. Principal #4 described the effective communication and relationships

developed among the teachers and the students:

I think part of the motivation as well is that these kids choose to come here. I

think that choice may play a big factor in that. My kids are comfortable in their

classrooms. When you go in my classrooms and look at the kids talking to the

teacher, there's such a great student-teacher rapport. They get along

fantastically. They're not afraid to make mistakes. They're okay. They're

transparent in their learning. Like, "I don't get this.' 'What are you talking

about?' And you kind of see the teachers and the kids joking around and they're

comfortable. They're in an environment where they know that they're

supported.

Principal #5, who oversees a magnet school indicated that truancy was not a big issue at his school; however, he explained that any child that is truant, whether it's one or two hundred, concerns me. According to Principal #5, one of the primary tactics that they use to work with truant students is communication. The first mode of communication would be through an interview. Typically, the interview consists of administrators and counselors and they work with the student to identify why they are not interested in attending school. The interview process helps students to make connections, establish relationships, and find strategies to make their school experience enjoyable.

Among his staff, Principal #5 said that he encouraged three R's: Relationships, Relevance, and Rigor. He explained the meaning of each concept and how the three R's ultimately related to student success:

They got to know that you care about them and their future. And I talk to my teachers. I had a meeting with them this morning. The first thing out of my mouth was the relationship piece. At the end of the year, keep those relationships going. The relevance is the learning purpose right? How will you use it in the future? The kids have to conceptualize in learning. How will they use this learning? Is it meaningful and purposeful for them? Does it relate to anything in their future lives? And so, the Rigor, I said, 'You know, you got to allow the kids – if you spoon feed, you're doing them a disservice. You're doing

more harm than good. That's educational malpractice.' But, today's kids have to be thinkers on their feet. Teach them how to use the information, but also how to use the latest technology. That's very important. So, those three R's, we talk about pretty frequently.

Principal #6 who as twenty-one years of experience as an educational administrator and oversees a single-sex academy indicated that truancy was not an issue at the school because it was a magnet school. The young ladies that apply to the school believe in the mission and vision of the school and want to be here to learn. Principal #6 explained the various elements that contributed to the successful student attendance rate:

> I think first of all, the young ladies are removed from – in traditional – in co-ed classrooms, often times girls are – girls shut down because they don't feel that their voices are being heard and sometimes young men – not meaning to be – can be somewhat aggressive in classrooms. So, I think here, all these young ladies when they enter this school, they know that everyone here is smart. They know that that they're competing, you know, with one another, but they also understand the importance of supporting their sisters as they are matriculating from middle school to high school. And, I think the teachers play a vital role, because most of our classrooms – the sizes are – well, they're larger than they

have been, but you know, teachers do have an opportunity to have those one-on-one conversations with our students.

Similarly, Principal #9 who has been an administrator at a single-sex academy for two years stated that truancy is not an issue at the school. When asked what she attributed to the lack of truancy, Principal #9 replied:

> The lack of truancy is because this school is tailor-made for each child that attends it. And I know that sounds like an oxymoron. How can something be tailor-made for all students? And I tell you there's a way that that can happen. Number one our school is small. [The total school population is two seventy-two]. Okay, so – and then that's a middle high. Small, middle high and so we're able to know all of our students, number one, and you know, put our hands on them each day. The second thing that keeps our students coming to school every day is every school has its own beat, its own rhythm, or its own characteristics. Ours is Lyceum. Lyceum is a time in the morning to zero hour.

Principal #9 stated that during Lyceum everything stops and all individuals in the school building report to the auditorium. Everyone recites the school's purpose, creed, and mission statement for the district and the school. After that, the staff and the administration teach lessons on habits of mind like perseverance, thinking flexibly, and working interdependently. The goal is to reach each student mentally, intellectually, emotionally, and socially.

Principal #17 who has twelve years of experience in educational administration indicated that truancy was not an issue at the high school; in fact, he stated that the school has one of the lowest dropout rates in the district. He attributed that to the school's status as a "community school" and to the presence of a culture of graduation. The concept of a community school simply means there is a high degree of parental involvement and support from the community. Principal #17 explained that the culture of graduation is developed through building relationships with students and the leadership at the school. According to Principal #17, the culture of graduation stems from the students knowing that dropping out and not coming to school will not be tolerated. The expectation is that graduation is something that is going to happen; not may happen. It's an idea that's been pushed towards the parents and the students. He further illustrated the idea:

> When they come to [our school], they already know that, I'm coming because I know my student – my child is going to graduate. Because some of the parents that come to [our school] from other schools, they'll say, 'I want my kid to come to [this school] because I want him to graduate. So, sometimes that's expected from us, but for parents who may have never graduated from high school themselves or may not have had any siblings graduate, that's a big thing. So, our focus is trying to move them beyond just to graduate – that's an expected. But, these are the things that we want your child to be successful beyond graduation.

Due to the professional experience of the preceding administrators their definitions of success have been constructed differently than other administrators working in traditional high schools. Administrators at magnet schools, single-sex academies, and early college high schools overwhelmingly reported that there was not an issue of truancy at their respective schools due to high expectations and rigorous and engaging curriculum.

Summary of Findings

The interview data indicates that there is not a shared construct of success among stakeholders involved with truancy reduction programs. Parson's (1951; 1955) and Blumer's (1969) concepts of socialization and symbolic interactionism provide a foundation for examining the complex process of meaning making among the stakeholders within the Dallas County Truancy Court. Socialization refers to individual's acquisition of the rules and norms appropriate for specific social settings while symbolic interactionism occurs within the process of socialization and is the idea that humans develop meaning through interactions (Blumer 1969; Parsons, 1951, 1955). Judges, parents, non-profit administrators, and principals have been socialized through their families, professions, and institutions such as federal, state, and local government. Internal factors such as personal experience and external factors such as state legislation and other institutional elements influenced participants' definitions of success. The processes of socialization that take place impact stakeholders' definitions of success and

the process of symbolic interactionism causes those definitions to be constantly redefined. Based on the interview data it can be concluded that as a child, Judge A was socialized through his family to place a high value on education as a tool for economic self-sufficiency. Thus, for Judge A, success means graduating from high school and continuing on to further education, however, through his profession Judge A's definition of success is more narrow and directly related to the requirements of truancy law and the allowed number of absences. The following examples collected throughout the interview process illustrate internal and external factors that influenced stakeholders' definitions of success of the truancy reduction program:

Personal Experience:

Judge A described himself as a disciplined student that never missed a day of school kindergarten through twelfth grade

A non-profit administrator who was a high school dropout stated that there was a different path to success for everyone

Institutional Factors:

All Judges indicated that the court did not have access to information to track the academic components that could be used to define the success of students as a proxy for the truancy reduction programs

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Several parents indicated that the school inaccurately reported their

child's attendance

Three non-profit administrators defined success for the truancy reduction

program as students completing the program because they did not have

the resources or information to base the success of the truancy reduction

program on any other factors

State Legislation

Judge D noted that his definition of success did not encompass any

contextual issues (emotional, familial, and/or behavioral) that may have

led to truancy because the role of the court was narrowly bound by law

Several principals suggested that state legislation only allowed for a

narrow definition of success based on AYP indicators

The court, families, state government, and schools operate within their own silos

and they are only able to address issues that are within their realm of authority as

dictated by law or institutional constraints. For example, judges and non-profit

administrators are unable to address academic components because they do not have

access to the necessary school information. Parents indicated that the school did not

provide the appropriate level of support to ensure their child's success as the school

focused on academics. The increased communication and collaboration of the

stakeholders allows for a more holistic view of students success as a proxy for the success of truancy reduction programs.

Judges, parents, non-profit administrators, and principals appeared to form their definition of success of the truancy reduction program through personal experiences and interactions with outside institutions such as the state legislature. Each stakeholder's definition of success was influenced by direct or indirect interactions with individuals within the organization or outside the organization that had the ability to influence organizational policies. Such an approach is an example of Herman's and Renz's (1999) theory of social construction that suggests that the notion of effectiveness is a social construct created by the interactions of multiple stakeholders within and outside organizations. Herman and Renz (1999) suggest that effectiveness is not an objective reality, but "rather effectiveness is a social construction, an achievement of organizational agents and other stakeholders convincing each other that an organization is pursuing the right objectives in the right way" (Herman & Renz, 1999, p.109). This study supports Herman's and Renz's (1999) claims because judges, parents, non-profit administrators, and principals' definition of success were influenced by direct or indirect interactions with individuals within the organization or outside the organization that had an impact on organizational policies.

Fassett (2001) also explored this formation of definitions across organizations by analyzing the processes by which educational success and failure was constructed

and the impact that had on educational reform. Like the current study, the researcher

found that participant definitions of success and non-success varied due to differing

goals and values and therefore, concluded that success was socially constructed. Similar

to Fassett (2001) this study also identified internal and external constructions of

success. The internal constructions of success stemmed from stakeholders' personal

experiences while the external constructions of success arose from legal mandates and

legislation.

Definitions of success for an individual student as a proxy for the truancy

reduction program fail to account for the institutional practices that may lead students to

become truant. Some of these practices were highlighted by parents – students taking

class roll, schools marking students absent who are in 'in-school suspension' (ISS), etc.

Southwell (2006) suggests that schools as institutions are hesitant to look at themselves

as causing truancy. Based on the interview data, schools acknowledge that problems

within their institution, however, schools are operating with very limited resources and

are hindered by constraints placed upon them by the state. In accordance with state

truancy laws schools are required to ensure compliance. Specifically, in the state of

Texas, schools are required to accurately monitor and report attendance, educate parents

and students on truancy laws, and provide some type of intervention with a program or

plan of action prior to referring a student to court (Texas Education Code, 2013).

Schools are required to maintain high attendance and graduation rates and exhibit

proficient levels of content mastery by students on state standardized assessments. Funding is based on meeting those requirements (Southwell, 2006). As an institution, schools have mandated definitions of success.

Defining success becomes even more complex when the existing class structures that prominent critical theorists such as Bourdieu (1989), Lareau (2003), and Marx and Engels (1888) identify is taken into account. Critical theorists would argue that the success of a child is predetermined based on where he/she falls on the social class spectrum. Lareau (2003) built on the ideas of Marx & Engels (1888) and Bourdieu (1989) and she would suggest that the current study's findings are based on the fact that if the student is from the affluent, dominant class, their social and cultural capital will be valued and rewarded in school, however, if a student is from the working class, their social and cultural capital will not be in consensus with what is valued by the dominant class, and therefore, those students will not be rewarded and their level of success is limited (Lareau, 2003). The affluent, dominant class also has the power to influence curriculum and course tracks and as a result the working class is classified as dumb, slow, or lazy because their values, norms, and skills do not mesh with what is valued at school. Most truant students come from working class families (Southwell, 2006). These claims espoused by critical theorists suggest that within society at large there are already multiple definitions of success that have been constructed based on a student's

class. These multiple definitions of success are legitimized by the idea that the United States, like most other developed countries is a meritocracy (Bourdieu 1989).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) would describe Bourdieu's (1989), Marx's and Engels' (1888), and Lareau's (2003) critical theorist views as taken for granted realities and thus would label stakeholder's definitions of success as taken for granted realities. Berger and Luckman (1966) would question the processes that create these realities. Schools assume that truancy is a result of individual deficiencies instead of acknowledging the impact of the existing class structure and the additional burden that may place on working class students (i.e hunger, homelessness, drug addiction, family violence, etc.). How are these structural conditions created to benefit affluent students? Why are affluent students perceived as "better" than working class students? What are the factors that reinforce that view of students? There is no clear answer to these questions because there are multiple realities in existence.

Findings from government commissioned studies such as the Coleman Report (1966) further reinforce this dichotomy between affluent and working class students which leads to contrasting definitions of success for students as proxies for the truancy reduction program. The initial findings of the Coleman Report (1966) indicated that student's family background, socioeconomic status, racial composition of the schools, and the student's perceived control in determining their future were far more related to academic achievement than the quality of a student's school. Stakeholders that

participated in this research project would disagree with Coleman's initial claims

because they fail to account for institutional factors and instead blame individual and

familial deficiencies. For example, institutional constraints such as poor attendance

reporting, access to information, and other school processes also influence student

success in relation to the truancy reduction programs. Educational legislation that has

been introduced by the federal government also benefits the affluent student.

Educational legislation is designed to provide guidelines for defining success. Most

recently, No Child Left Behind (2008) was introduced to increase accountability at the

individual school and district level. NCLB acknowledges the dichotomy between the

affluent and subpopulations such as students with disabilities, economically

disadvantaged students, students with limited English proficiency, and racial minorities,

and as a result, achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP) is based on increasing the

levels of student success within these subpopulation categories. Stakeholders indicated

that it was difficult to define success because educational legislation such as NCLB

already provided strict guidelines for what constitutes success. Graduation, attendance

rates, retention rates, standardized assessments, and the rate of completion of advanced

placement and college preparatory courses are used to calculate the AYP of a school;

therefore, stakeholders used the same indicators to define success.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This research project examined the following research questions: 1) What are the challenges faced in defining the measurement of success when multiple organizations with multiple stakeholders are involved in a decentralized arrangement? 2) How is success of a truancy reduction program defined by school districts, school principals, parents, and judges? 3) Is the definition of success used by schools, districts, and the state the same as the definition of success used by key stakeholders and nonprofit organizations that work with truant students? All questions were addressed and the interview data suggested that there is not a shared construct of success in relation to truancy reduction programs among stakeholders within the Dallas County Truancy Court due to institutional constraints and personal/professional experience.

Implications, Directions for Future Study, and Policy Recommendations

The findings in the current study indicate that stakeholders have varying perceptions of the definition of success based on internal and external constructions. The stakeholders included in the current study are judges, parents, non-profit administrators, and principals. Future research could include student's definition of success since most stakeholders definition of success is in relation to the success of individual students. In addition, future research could interview multiple participants within the same organization or institution to determine if definitions vary within

institutions or organizations or just within the organizational field. Based on the findings three policy recommendations are proposed for developing a consistent definition for success among organizational fields within institutions, such as the Dallas County Truancy Court. The first is specific to all stakeholders. It is recommended that there is increased collaboration among stakeholders to facilitate the flow of information. The last two are more specific to district, state, and federal policy which dictates the definition of success within school districts. A reevaluation is needed of curriculum requirements and state testing and more emphasis is needed on the career aspect of the College and Career Readiness Standards.

The current research indicates that stakeholders operate within their own organizational silos and focus on only one aspect of defining success around truancy. Numerous studies have shown that truancy is a multi-faced issue and more success can be achieved through the collaboration of multiple stakeholders (Bell, Rosen, & Dynlacht, 1994; Bazemoire, Sitnchcomb, & Leip, 2004; Byer and Kuhn, 2003). Increased interaction among the stakeholders could also facilitate the development of a more consistent definition of success for the truancy reduction program. Additionally, the interview data indicated that judges, parents, non-profits and principals had limited definitions of success because they did not have access to pertinent student information such as school discipline reports, 504 plans, individual education plans, attendance records, grades (six weeks average, overall GPA, and standardized assessments),

students' schedule of classes, police record, and court documents. Each stakeholder has access to some student information; however, no individual stakeholder has access to all of these elements of a student's record making it difficult to effectively assist the student and provide a definition of success.

Federal legislation such as The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) at times makes it cumbersome to share information across institutions. FERPA was created to protect the privacy of student education records. Parents and eligible students have the right to examine and review educational records and request corrections. Eligible students are those eighteen years of age or older attending a secondary or post-secondary educational institution. The law states that no information from the student's educational record can be released without the parent's or eligible student's written consent; however, FERPA guidelines do allow schools the discretion to disclose student's educational records without consent to the following entities in these specific instances:

School officials with legitimate educational interest;

Other schools to which a student is transferring;

Specified officials for audit or evaluation purposes;

Appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student;

Organizations conducting certain studies for or on behalf of the school;

Accrediting organizations;

To comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena;

Appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies; and

State and local authorities, within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific

state laws (United States Department of Education, 2014)

The majority of the stakeholders involved with the Dallas County Truancy Court already have general guidelines through their professions (i.e. judges, layers, social workers, principals, etc.) for protecting records whether they are for a juvenile or an adult. Currently, most stakeholders within the Dallas County Truancy Court have to rely on student and parent self-reports for information which are not always accurate. The guidelines set forth for sharing information across institutions by FERPA allows judges to access student records, but does not explicitly state that non-profit organizations affiliated with the state or local authorities can have access to student records. Principals within the various districts are limited to information obtained within that educational institution. The non-profit organizations work more closely with the student and have the flexibility to cater the services to fit the student's needs so that they can be successful. The flow of information will also facilitate a more comprehensive and consistent definition of success among stakeholders across institutions.

The next two policy recommendations are interrelated. A re-evaluation of curriculum requirements and reassessment of state testing, along with placing more emphasis on the career aspect of the College and Career Readiness Standards can make

a great impact on developing a definition of success that responds to the diversity of high school students in the Dallas court system schools. The uniformly mandated curriculum does not engage students. Several stakeholders suggested that the educational system was broken and that the curriculum needed to be redeveloped to accommodate for students that were not interested in an academic track. Mark Phillips (2012), an educational teacher and journalist, suggests that there is a blue-collar stigma in our white-collar society. Phillips (2012) states that this bias is destructive to our society because schools steer students away from vocational programs, thus depriving students of twenty-first century skills that are needed to compete in the global market. Opponents of the vocational track suggest that tracking students to determine their placement on the various tracks has been associated with the discrimination of students based on race and social class. Tracking refers to the widespread practice of sorting students based on their academic ability or perceived aspirations in the public educational system and beyond (Oakes, Selvin, Karoly, & Guiton, 1992). Research supports the view of the opponents of the vocational track by finding that tracking inadvertently sorts immigrant and minority students into lower, less rigorous tracks such as vocational curriculum while their white counterparts are placed on academic tracks with more rigorous curriculum that prepares them to be college ready. The racial and socioeconomic implications associated with tracking have also resulted in a reduction of vocational programs offered at the high school level; however, Oakes, Selvin, Karoly,

and Guiton (1992) propose that that there is no discrimination based on race or class when tracking students, but that students' tracks correspond with the achievement gap (Oakes, Selvin, Karoly, & Guiton, 1992). The achievement gap refers to the disparity in educational outcomes between different groups within the student population, namely Caucasians, African Americans, and Hispanics (Oakes, Selvin, Karoly, & Guiton, 1992).

While there are those that oppose vocational programs due to the risk of tracking and its potential effects, there are also proponents of vocational programs in high school educational settings (Lynch, 2000). Proponents of the vocational track suggest that career education provides opportunities for those most at risk of being left behind. Advocates for the vocational track see the programs as another avenue for students to be successful because instead of menial low skills jobs, students can have a specialized skill set (Phillips, 2012). Some proponents even recommend what they term "new vocational education" which is in essence a hybrid of the academic and vocational track (Lynch, 2000). Lynch (2000) states that "the purposes of high school career and technical education are":

Providing career exploration and planning

Enhancing academic achievement and motivation to learn more

Acquiring generic work competencies and skills useful for employment

Establishing pathways for continuing education and lifelong learning

(Lynch, 2000, p. viii).

State testing was identified as one of the state's major indicators of success for schools and students; therefore, schools place a huge emphasis on test scores. Several stakeholders questioned whether state-mandated tests were an accurate measure of success. The state should reassess the need for state-mandated testing and how the results of testing are used outside of the school, such as the court system. Currently, the state uses the test scores to rank schools; however, the data may be better used to determine areas that students excel and struggle in and to develop curriculum more reflective of skills that students need to develop. If the various stakeholders affiliated with the Dallas County Truancy Court and policy makers review and implement these policy recommendations, a more consistent definition of success can be developed and students can be better serviced within the truancy reduction program.

APPENDIX A

LETTER FOR SOLICITING PARTICIPATION

GENERAL LETTER REQUESTIONG PRINCIPALS, NON-PROFITS, AND JUDGES' PARTICIPATION

Good Afternoon,

My name is Veronica Cole and I am a doctoral candidate at The University of Texas in Arlington in the department of urban and public administration. I have reached the final stages of my long, arduous journey…the dissertation process. I am looking forward to conducting research and adding to the continuing body of literature concerning truancy reduction programs. My research project is entitled "Effective Truancy Reduction Programs and the Measure of Success" and will focus on how key stakeholders define the success of truancy reduction programs.

To conduct my study I am seeking judges, administrators, parents of truant students, and non-profit organization administrators. I am writing this email to request your participation in my study. Your participation will entail an interview (60 minutes). The interview will be in-person and recorded. If you agree to participate in the study, a consent form will be emailed to you at least 48 hours prior to the interview so that you can have time to review the procedures and a hard copy will be provided prior to beginning the interview during the scheduled time.

Once the research has been completed, I will provide you with a copy of your interview (prior to including the information in my dissertation), in addition to my findings so that you can use it for program evaluation and/or program modifications.

If you can assist with this research endeavor, please let me know so that we can schedule a time to meet. Thank-you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Veronica Cole

Veronica.cole@mavs.uta.edu

972-849-1495

LETTER REQUESTING THE PARTICIPATION OF PRINCIPALS IN THE RICHARDSON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Good Afternoon,

My name is Veronica Cole and I am a doctoral candidate at The University of Texas in Arlington in the department of urban and public administration, as well as, a teacher in RISD. I have reached the final stages of my long, arduous journey…the dissertation process. I am looking forward to conducting research and adding to the continuing body of literature concerning truancy reduction programs. My research will focus on the impact that truancy reduction programs have on student success.

I am writing this email to request your participation in my study. Your participation will entail an interview (60 minutes). Once the research has been completed, I will provide you with a copy of your interview (prior to including the information in my dissertation), in addition to my findings so that you can use it for program evaluation and/or program modifications.

I have already contacted the RISD central office to request approval and this was the response I received from Allie Callaway:

RISD does not provide letters giving permission to interview individuals for graduate or post-graduate work. You need to contact a principal or administrator and explain to them your reasons and criteria. It would be up to that individual to decide if they want to participate in your request.

If you can assist with this research endeavor, please let me know so that we can schedule a time to meet. Thank-you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Veronica Cole

Veronica.cole@risd.org

972-849-1495

APPENDIX B

PHONE SCRIPTS FOR SOLICITING PARTICIPATION

PHONE SCRIPT FOR JUDGES

Script for Judges

Hello, May I speak to _____? My name is Veronica Cole and I am a student at the University of Texas at Arlington and I am currently working on my dissertation. My dissertation topic concerns effective truancy reduction programs and the measurement of success. I am calling to request your participation in a 60 minute, in person, recorded interview about truancy reduction programs and the measurement of success from your perspective as a judge. If you agree to participate in the study, a consent form will be emailed to you at least 48 hours prior to the interview so that you can have time to review the procedures and a hard copy will be provided prior to beginning the interview during the scheduled time. Once the research has been completed, I will provide you with a copy of your interview (prior to including the information in my dissertation), in addition to my findings so that you can use it for program evaluation and/or program modifications. Would it be possible for you to assist with this research endeavor? When can we schedule a time to meet?

PHONE SCRIPT FOR NON-PROFIT ADMINISTRATORS

Script for Non-Profit Organizations

Hello, May I speak to _____? My name is Veronica Cole and I am a student at the University of Texas at Arlington and I am currently working on my dissertation. My dissertation topic concerns effective truancy reduction programs and the measurement of success. I was referred to you by the Dallas County Truancy Court program coordinator Trina Crosby. I am calling to request your participation in a 60 minute, in person, recorded interview about truancy reduction programs and the measurement of success from your perspective as a non-profit administrator. If you agree to participate in the study, a consent form will be emailed to you at least 48 hours prior to the interview so that you can have time to review the procedures and a hard copy will be provided prior to beginning the interview during the scheduled time. Once the research has been completed, I will provide you with a copy of your interview (prior to including the information in my dissertation), in addition to my findings so that you can use it for program evaluation and/or program modifications. Would it be possible for you to assist with this research endeavor? When can we schedule a time to meet?

APPENDIX C

APPLICATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON
OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

IRB FORM #1
INITIAL SUBMISSION OF A RESEARCH PROTOCOL TO
THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF
HUMAN SUBJECTS

Faculty, staff, students, or employees who propose to engage in any research, demonstration, development, or other activity involving the use of human subjects must have review and approval of that activity by the Institutional Review Board, prior to initiation of that project. The Board is responsible for safeguarding the rights and welfare of subjects who participate in the activity.
If you require further assistance in completing this form or need additional information, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at extension 3723.

SECTION A: GENERAL INFORMATION

1. **Project Title:** Effective Truancy Reduction Programs and Measuring Success

2. **Principal Investigator:**

   - **Name**: Veronica Cole   **Title:** Doctoral Candidate for Urban and   Public Administration

   - **Mail Box**: 350 E Vista Ridge Mall Dr, Apt 834

   Lewisville, TX 75067

   - **Telephone**: 972-849-1495   **Email**: veronica.cole@mavs.uta.edu

3. **Co-Investigator:**

- **Name**:

- **Title**:

- **Department:**   **Mail Box**:

- **Telephone**:   **Email**:

4. **For a student submitting a protocol, please identify the faculty member responsible for conducting the research:**

- **Name:**Dr. Maria Cosio-Martinez

- **Title:** Associate Professor and PUAD Ph. D. Advisor

- **Department:** Urban and Public Affairs   **Mail Box:**19588

- **Telephone:** 817-272-3302   **Email:**mcosio@uta.edu

5. **Expected Start Date: February 1, 2013**   *(You are not authorized to start any research on human subjects until the IRB has approved the research protocol.)*

6. **Expected Completion Date: June 2013**

SECTION B: FUNDING If this research is not supported by funding, please skip to section C.

If you have or are seeking funding for your research, please specify the source.

7. Source: ☐ **FEDERAL (Specify Agency:**)

☐ **INDUSTRY SPONSORED (Specify Agency:**)

☐ **Local Departmental** ☐ **State** ☐ **Other:**

FUNDED GRANT / CONTRACT NUMBER:

☐ **Check here if grant is pending. Date of Grant Submission:**

8. Do you plan to do the research if you do not receive funding? Yes

SECTION C: SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PROTOCOL

Please answer the following in simple, non-technical / non-exculpatory language.

9. List primary research questions.

1) How is the success of a truancy reduction program measured?

2) Is the measure of success used by schools the same as the definition of success used by administrators, parents, and judges?

3) Is the measure of success used by districts the same as the definition of success used by administrators, parents, and judges?

4) Is the measure of success used by the state the same as the definition of success used by administrators, parents, and judges?

5) Is the measure of success used by schools, districts, and the state the same as the definition of success used by nonprofit organizations and agencies that work with truant students?

Describe the research design.

A case study research design will be used to explore (6) Dallas County truancy reduction programs (Dallas ISD, Mesquite ISD, Richardson ISD, Garland ISD, Sunnyvale ISD, and Texans Can Academy. Data will   be collected using structured interviews. In an effort to determine how success is measured Dallas County truancy court judges, administrators, nonprofit organizations, and parents will be interviewed to assess the rationale, goals, components, and outcomes of the truancy reduction program.

10. List potential benefits that may accrue to the study subjects as a result of their participation.

Potential benefits that may accrue to the study subjects as a result of their participation are:
➢ The study will identify effective methods used in truancy reduction programs and thus could lead to the incorporation of various elements into the truancy reduction program to improve levels of student success

➢ Continuous evaluation is vital to any program. This study will identify different methods/perspectives for evaluating success of truancy reduction programs so that the needs of students involved with the program can be met and progress can be accurately measured

11. List potential benefits that may accrue to society as a result of this study.

Potential benefits that may accrue to society as a result of this study are:
➢ The various perspectives of key stakeholders included in the study will provide a deeper understanding of truancy and how success is measured

➢ The data collected throughout the study will provide ideas for program improvement and could result in the creation of a more educated workforce and increased levels of high school graduation

12. What are you and your research team's relevant qualifications to perform this research?

I have taken graduate level courses in evaluation research, social policy formation, research methods   in criminal justice, educational policy issues, and advanced data analysis
qualitative methods. I also have three years working in an educational setting as a teacher of social studies. In addition, my supervising professor has conducted school-based research, teaches graduate qualitative courses and will supervise my work in the field.

14. CHECK <u>ALL</u> RESEARCH PROCEDURES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS:

Any materials presented to the research subject (oral or written) may not ask of the subject to provide information about another human being who has not undergone the informed consent process (this includes the immediate family of the subject).

☐ **Collection of Blood** *State below the methods of collection (i.e. venipuncture, arterial puncture, etc.) Attach IRB Form #5 if a Tissue Repository is needed.*

☐ **Collection of Other Bodily Materials** *State below the methods of collection. Please attach IRB Form #5 if a Tissue Repository is needed.*

☐ **Analysis of Existing Data**

☐ **Cognitive or Perceptual Experiment**

☐ **Evaluation of a Program or Services** *State below whether it is Federal, State, Local, or 'Other'.*

☒ **Interview** *State below whether it is oral or written and attach a finalized copy.*

☐ **Questionnaire or Survey** *Attach a finalized copy*

☐ **Induction of Mental or Physical Stress**

☐ **Use of Private Health Information** *State below the method for obtaining this data*

☒ **Audio/Video recording of subjects**

☐ **Use of Genomic DNA or cDNA**

☐ **Use of Infectious or Carcinogenic Materials**

☐ **Educational Test or Educational Materials (curriculum, books, etc.)** *Attach copies or describe in detail*

☐ **Observation of Public Behavior with PI Participation**

☐ **Observation of Public Behavior without PI Participation**

☐ **Analysis of Existing Biological Specimens** *State below where the samples were obtained from, where they will be kept and for how long, and who will have access to them.*

☐ **Deception** *State below the debriefing procedures used*

☐ **Taste Test**

☐ **Medical Procedures** *(e.g. drug, device, radiation, surgery, non-surgical manipulation, non-invasive physical measurements, etc.)*

☐ **Materials Commonly Regarded as Socially Unacceptable**

☐ **Use of Identified Data/Specimens**

☐ **Use of Coded Data/Specimens**

☐ **Use of Recombinant DNA** *Attach a copy of the IBC application for rDNA along with this submission to the IRB*

☐ **Use of Biohazardous Materials**

☐ **Psychological Test** *Attach Applicable copies or describe in detail*

14a.   Please describe, in sufficient detail, the procedures for any checked items above. If you need more
space, you may attach a separate sheet of paper.

Interview
Dallas County truancy court judges, administrators, nonprofit organizations, and parents will be interviewed   to assess the rationale, goals, components, and outcomes of the truancy reduction program in an effort to   determine how success is measured by individuals involved with the program. The interviews will be   recorded using two devices: a traditional tape recorder and the recorder function of the i-phone. The only identifying information that will be included is demographic (i.e. age, race, occupation, district, etc.). In   addition, a coding system will be developed using numbers to protect each participants' identity. After the interviews have been conducted and recorded, the recordings will be transcribed. After transcription, the   recordings will be maintained in Dr. Maria Martinez-Cosio's office in University Hall 544. Protocol   Included.

14b.   If the proposed research <u>is limited to</u> the use of discarded materials or retrospective chart review and there are no identifiers associating the specimens or chart information with the donors, skip sections D through G. However, if the donors can be identified, fill out section D and then skip to section H.

SECTION D: STUDY POPULATION

15.   Please indicate which, if any, of the following are involved:

☐ **UTA Staff**

☐ **UTA Faculty**

☐ **UTA Students**

☐ **Non-English Speaking People** *Attach the consent form and all applicable materials in the native language(s) of the subjects in the research*

☒ **Adults competent to consent for themselves (non-UTA)**

☐ **Mentally Incapacitated** *Attach IRB Form #2A*

☐ **Children** *(Ages 0-17 years)* **Attach IRB Form #2D**

☐ **Pregnant Women, Fetuses, or In Vitro Fertilization** *Attach IRB Form#2C*

☐ **Prisoners** *Attach IRB Form #2C*

16. **Total number of subjects** 100

17. **Subject recruitment. Please summarize your explanation of how you will recruit subjects. Include location of recruitment and enrollment.** *Please attach a copy of all recruitment flyers and ads.*

    Subjects will be recruited using letters, direct person-to person contact, and by telephone from the   Dallas County truancy court, nonprofit organizations that work in   conjunction with the Dallas County   truancy court, parents whose children have been referred to the Dallas County truancy court, and   the six districts that work in conjunction with the Dallas County truancy court (Dallas ISD,   Garland   ISD, Mesquite ISD, Richardson ISD, Sunnyvale ISD, Texans Can   Academy). Interviews will be   conducted in person. If individuals agree to participate in the study, they will be emailed the consent   form at least 48 hours prior to the interview so that they can have time to review the procedures and a   hard copy will be provided prior to beginning the interview during the scheduled time.

Examples of subject recruitment:
☐ **Direct person- to person solicitation per consent form.**
☒ **Telephone (attach oral presentation)**
☒ **Letter (attach finalized copy)**
☐ **Notices (attach finalized copy)**
☐ **Internet (attach finalized copy)**
☐ **Subject pool**
☐ **Other (explain and / or attach finalized copy if applicable)**

17a. List all criteria for including subjects.

Subjects must be an administrator employed by Dallas ISD, Garland ISD, Sunnyvale ISD,   Richardson ISD, Mesquite ISD, or Texans Can Academy or a judge or program coordinator working in conjunction with the Dallas County truancy court. Subjects will also include parents who have a child that has been assigned to the Dallas County truancy court.

17b. List all criteria for excluding subjects.

Administrators not employed by Dallas ISD, Garland ISD, Sunnyvale ISD, Richardson ISD, Mesquite ISD, or Texans Can Academy or a judge or program coordinator not working in conjunction with the Dallas County truancy court. Parents who do not have a child that has been assigned to the Dallas County truancy court.

18. **What rewards, remuneration, or other incentives, if any, will be used to recruit subjects?**

   None

19. **If the subject is a student who is undergoing this research for a course credit, how will you ensure that the subject was not coerced into participating N/A**

20. **Will you allow alternatives to the participation in the research without negative consequences? The administrators', judges', parents', and non-profit organizations' choice to participate will have no affect on their involvement with the program being evaluated.**

SECTION E: CONFIDENTIALITY – PRIVACY – COERCION

21. **Does this activity utilize data collected for other purposes? (e.g. student record, student assessments, patient records, etc.) (If this is for a data**

repository, please complete and attach an IRB Form #5 as well as a Consent Form for Data Repositories)

☐YES   ☒NO

    a. **If yes, please specify the source of data to be utilized and how the data will be retrieved and reviewed.**

    b. **Could any of the recorded data contain personal or sensitive information? If yes, how do you propose to code and where will you maintain confidentiality of the data?** Personal/sensitive information of judges, administrators, and parents will not be used to in the presentation of the data or results, however, the judges', administrators', and parents' recorded interviews may contain identifying information so all records will be kept in a locked file cabinet in Dr. Maria Martinez-Cosio's office, University Hall 544.

(Any subject data (including documents, audio, and videotapes) developed for or used by a human subject investigation protocol are potentially sensitive and must be maintained with confidentiality. All identifiable data are to be kept in a designated locked file. Sharing of identifiable data with other institutions, agencies, or companies must be identified prospectively to both the IRB and the subjects of the study.)

    22. **Could any part of this activity result in the potential identification of child abuse, elderly abuse, communicable diseases, or criminal activities that would / could not have been otherwise identified? If yes, estimate the likelihood of disclosure and describe the plan of action that you will take if this occurs.** *In rare circumstances when research reveals these issues, confidentiality should be maintained to the extent that the law allows.*

☐YES   ☒ NO

    23. **Does any part of this activity have the potential for coercion of the subject? If yes, explain and describe proposed safeguards.**

☐YES ☒NO

24. **Please explain how you plan to maintain confidentiality. Include where your signed consent forms and identifiable data, if applicable, will be kept (under lock and key) and who will have access.**

I will maintain confidentiality by using keeping all identifiable data and consent forms under lock and   key.

SECTION F: RISKS - PSYCHOLOGICAL RISKS

25. **Aside from possible loss of confidentiality, is there a possibility of psychological injury resulting from participating in the research?**

☐YES ☒NO

26. **If you answered yes, how do you plan to minimize and control the risks?**

27. **Could the desired information be obtained from animals or other laboratory models? Explain.**

☐YES ☒NO

In the event of an adverse event, you must fill out the IRB Form #8 to report the event to the Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects <u>immediately</u>.

SECTION G: RISKS - PHYSICAL RISKS

28. **Is there a possibility of physical injury resulting from participation in the research?**

☐YES ☒NO

29. If you answered yes, how do you plan to minimize and control the risks?

30. Could the desired information be obtained from animals or other laboratory models? Explain.

☐YES ☒ NO

In the event of an adverse event, you must fill out the IRB Form #8 to report the event to the Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects <u>immediately</u>.

SECTION H: COST OF RESEARCH

31. Will the subjects incur any additional expenses for experimental (or otherwise unnecessary diagnostic) tests or procedures? If yes, explain

☐YES ☒NO

32. Is there any charge to the participant for participation? If yes, explain.

☐YES ☒NO

SECTION I: INFORMED CONSENT

33. Written, informed consent from the subject or from a legally responsible representative of the subject is normally required from the human research participants. The finalized consent form in all applicable languages should be included with the materials submitted to the IRB. You must keep all signed consent forms under lock and key during the study and for a period

of 3 years after termination of the research on UTA Campus. These consent forms are subject to inspection by the Research Compliance Officer, the IRB and / or DHHS.

If you do not plan to obtain consent or written documentation of consent, please attach a
completed IRB Form # 3.

    a. If appropriate, describe your rationale for obtaining oral consent or assent instead of written consent. Attach a copy of the information to be read and given to the subjects.

    b. Do you plan to make consent forms available in the native language for all subjects involved in the research? Please explain your procedures in determining the primary language spoken by the subjects and how you plan to deliver the informed consent process to subjects who do not speak English.

☐ YES   ☒ NO

SECTION J: COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS

34. If any part of this study will be conducted in an institution or location administratively separate from UTA, please indicate at which institution (attach an approval letter). Dallas County Truancy Court, Dallas ISD, Sunnyvale ISD, Garland ISD, Richardson ISD, Mesquite ISD, and Texans Can Academy.

35.

    a. Does this activity utilize recorded data to be sent to cooperating institutions, or agencies not under your control?

☐YES ☒NO

    b. **If yes, could the data contain personal or sensitive information or put the participant in any type of legal risk?**

    c. **If yes, how do you propose to maintain the confidentiality of the data?**

SECTION K: CONSULTATION AND COLLABORATION

36. Subject recruitment and management:

If approval is required from other professionals for the recruitment and management of the subjects, please identify and obtain signature(s) from the individual(s) responsible for the subjects. If unobtainable, please explain or attach a signed agreement or letter.

Name of Professional	Department	Signature	Date

1

2. _____ _____ _____
— ____

3. _____ _____ _____
— ____

36. Research collaboration:
Research collaborators are other researchers whose participation enhances the scientific merit of a research project. Have all collaborators indicate by signing

this document that they have read the research protocol and agree to participate. If unobtainable, please explain or attach a signed agreement or letter.

	Name of Collaborator **Date**	**Department**	**Signature**
1.	_____ _____	_____	
2.	_____ _____	_____	
3.	_____ _____	_____	

SECTION L: CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

**37.	Have you submitted a financial disclosure statement to your department chair listing all of your significant	financial interests in accordance with The University of Texas at Arlington conflict of interest policy?**

☐**YES**	☒**NO**

38. Did your department chair find that there was a potential conflict of interest and did he/she forward the statement to the Dean and / or the Vice President for Research and Information Technology?

☐**YES**	☒**NO**

39. If yes, please explain the conditions and restrictions imposed. If the conflict of interest is still pending review, please indicate here.

□YES □NO

40. Did your department chair forward the original statement to the Office of Research?

□YES □NO

SECTION M: SIGNATURES

I understand that I am responsible for the accuracy of the statements made in this protocol and for the conduct of research.

I understand that I am to submit annual reviews to the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. If the annual report (IRB FORM # 7) has not been received by the IRB Chair (or designee) by the anniversary date of the approval, this protocol's approval is terminated.

I understand that I am to file a final report upon conclusion of the research with the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB FORM # 7).

I understand that if my research is under a sponsored research agreement, additional standards may apply.

I am aware that the signed consent forms need to be filed under lock and key during the research and for a period of 3 years upon termination of the research (if unfunded). For funded research, the consent forms will be kept for the length established under the terms and conditions of the award. These consent forms will be available for inspection by the Research Compliance Officer or agents from Federal Agencies.

I understand that I, as well as all Human Subject Investigators involved in this study, must have documented Human Subject training in the Office of Research before performing any Human Subject research.

_____
_____
Principal Investigator   **Date**

I have examined this completed form and I am satisfied with the adequacy of the proposed research design and the measures proposed for the protection of Human Subjects. I will take responsibility for informing the student of the need for safekeeping of all raw data (e.g. test protocols, tapes, questionnaires, interview notes, etc.) in a university office or computer file.

_____
_____
Faculty Sponsor (If not the Principal Investigator)   **Date**

I have read this completed form and endorse this research to be conducted.

_____
_____
Department Chairman or Dean or Director   Date

APPENDIX D

SCHOOL DISTRICT RESEARCH APPPROVAL LETTERS

GARDLAND INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Ms. Veronica Cole
350 E. Vista Ridge Mall Drive, Apt 834
Lewisville, TX 75067

February 11, 2013

Dear Ms. Cole:

Thank you for the recent submission of your independent research project application for your study, *Effective Truancy Reduction Programs and the Measure of Success*. This letter is to inform you that your application documents have been reviewed. The review committee is pleased to provide **conditional approval** for participation in your study within the Garland Independent School District.

In order to proceed with your work on this project within the Garland Independent School District, the following conditions must be met:

☐ Approval is dependent on **approval by your university**. If significant changes to your study are made by the IRB **or** your research committee, you must resubmit this application. Furthermore, university approval must be received by the PRE office prior to contact being made with any district personnel.

☐ Participation may not be sought from campus administration as they do not have the depth of knowledge about the truancy program to be able to sufficiently respond to your inquiries.

☐ Study participation is limited to district-level administration. Upon meeting the above conditions, you may contact Ms. Wendy Brower, (972) 494-8255 or wlbrower@garlandisd.net, regarding study participation. Ms. Brower, or her designee, should have sufficient knowledge to provide you with an understanding of the truancy program as it exists in GISD.

☐ Individual student/parent information may <u>not</u> be provided by GISD in relation to this study. District participation is limited to providing program descriptions.

Please be advised that this conditional approval expires on May 31, 2013. Should you be unable to complete your research activities prior to this deadline, you are required to request an extension of the timeline. Extensions are granted based on extenuating

circumstances, so please be sure to provide a detailed explanation of the need for the extension if requested.

It is evident that this is a research topic that you are very dedicated to and we wish you well with your continued work on this project.

Best wishes,

Dr. Kimberly Klakamp

DALLAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Mike Miles
Superintendent of Schools

February 28, 2013

Miss Veronica Cole
The University of Texas at Arlington
350 E. Vista Ridge Mall Drive, Apt. 834
Lewisville, TX 75067

RE: Effective Truancy Reduction Programs and the Measure of Student Success

Dear Miss Cole:

The Research Review Board (RRB) of the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) has reviewed and approved your proposal to conduct the above-referenced study. Based on the information provided, the committee concludes that the study serves a worthwhile purpose and will benefit the district.

It is our understanding that you have read and agreed to the terms described in the *Procedures and Policies for Conducting Extra-District Research in the Dallas Independent School District*. Please note that all school and district information, wherever applicable, should remain confidential within the limits of the law. In addition, any data collected from Dallas ISD may be used solely for the purposes of the approved study.

Approval by the RRB does not guarantee that any Dallas ISD department, school, or employee will comply with data requests for the study. If the study involves collection of primary data at a school or schools, the permission of the building principal(s) must be obtained separately from this approval.

Please provide the RRB with a copy of any data file constructed using Dallas ISD student or personnel information, and a copy of your final report, within 30 days following the completion of the study. In all future communications, please use the study's reference number (12-055).

On behalf of the committee, I wish you the best of luck with your study.

Sincerely,

Dorothea Weir, Ph. D.
Chair, Research Review Board
Office of Applied Research
Department of Evaluation and Assessment
Dallas Independent School District

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARENTS, JUDGES, AND NON-PROFIT

ADMINISTRATORS

UT Arlington
Informed Consent Document
For Parents, Administrators, and Judges

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Veronica Cole, School of Urban and Public Affairs
Contact Information: veronica.cole@risd.org
972-849-1495

FACULTY ADVISOR
Dr. Maria Martinez-Cosio, Department of Urban and Public Affairs
Associate Professor and PUAD PH.D.
Contact Information: 817-272-3302

TITLE OF PROJECT
Effective Truancy Reduction Programs and the Measure of Success

INTRODUCTION
You are being asked to participate in a research study about truancy reduction programs and their impact on student success. Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinuing your participation at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

PURPOSE
The specific purpose of this research is to fully explore truancy reduction programs in an effort to determine best practices and to provide insight into how more students can leave school prepared to flourish in the United States' increasingly competitive, globalized society.

DURATION
Participation in this study will last approximately 60 minutes.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

The number of anticipated participants in this research study is 100

PROCEDURES
Participants will be contacted via email, by telephone, or direct person contact. The procedure which will involve you as a research participant is an interview. The interview will take place at the participants' office or at the Dallas County Truancy Court. Interviews will be conducted in person.

1

IRB Approval Date: **JAN 2 8 2013**

IRB Expiration Date:

JAN 2 8 2014

UT Arlington
Informed Consent Document
For Parents, Administrators, and Judges

The interview will be audio recorded. After the interview, the tape will be transcribed, which means they will be typed exactly as they were recorded, word-for-word, by the researcher. The tape will be destroyed after transcription.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS
Potential benefits that may accrue to society as a result of this study:
- ➤ Increase in high school graduates, resulting in a more educated workforce
- ➤ Decrease in delinquent activity related to the occurrence of truancy
- ➤ Decrease in the amount of federal aid needed for social programs

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS
There are no perceived risks or discomforts for participating in this research study. Should you experience any discomfort please inform the researcher, you have the right to quit any study procedures at any time at no consequence.

COMPENSATION
No compensation will be offered for participation in this study.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES
There are no alternative procedures offered for this study. However, you can elect not to participate in the study or quit at any time at no consequence.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of this signed consent form and all data collected including transcriptions/tapes from this study, will be stored in University Hall 544 at UTA for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway; it will be anonymous. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review

2

IRB Approval Date:

JAN 2 8 2013

IRB Expiration Date:

JAN 2 8 2014

UT Arlington
Informed Consent Document
For Parents, Administrators, and Judges

Board to review your research records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

Questions about this research study may be directed to:

Veronica Cole
972-849-1495
Veronica.cole@mavs.uta.edu

Dr. Maria Martinez-Cosio
817-272-3302
mcosio@uta.edu

Any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

_____

Signature and printed name of principal investigator or person obtaining consent   **Date**

CONSENT

By signing below, you confirm that you are 18 years of age or older and have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

_____

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER   **DATE**

3

IRB Approval Date: JAN 2 8 2013

IRB Expiration Date: JAN 2 8 2014

APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT FOR DISD PRINCIPALS

UT Arlington
Informed Consent Document
For Parents, Administrators, and Judges

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Veronica Cole, School of Urban and Public Affairs
Contact Information: veronica.cole@risd.org
972-849-1495

FACULTY ADVISOR
Dr. Maria Martinez-Cosio, Department of Urban and Public Affairs
Associate Professor and PUAD PH.D.
Contact Information: 817-272-3302

TITLE OF PROJECT
Effective Truancy Reduction Programs and the Measure of Success

INTRODUCTION
You are being asked to participate in a research study about truancy reduction programs and their impact on student success. Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinuing your participation at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

PURPOSE
The specific purpose of this research is to fully explore truancy reduction programs in an effort to determine best practices and to provide insight into how more students can leave school prepared to flourish in the United States' increasingly competitive, globalized society.

DURATION
Participation in this study will last approximately 60 minutes.

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PROCEDURES
Participants will be contacted via email, by telephone, or direct person contact. The procedure which will involve you as a research participant is an interview. The interview will take place at the participants' office or at the Dallas County Truancy Court. Interviews will be conducted in person.

APPROVED

IRB Approval Date: MAR 0 5 2013   JAN 2 8 2014

1

Institutional Review Board

IRB Expiration Date:

UT Arlington
Informed Consent Document
For Parents, Administrators, and Judges

The interview will be audio recorded. After the interview, the tape will be transcribed, which means they will be typed exactly as they were recorded, word-for-word, by the researcher. The tape will be destroyed after transcription.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS
Potential benefits that may accrue to society as a result of this study:
- ➤ Increase in high school graduates, resulting in a more educated workforce
- ➤ Decrease in delinquent activity related to the occurrence of truancy
- ➤ Decrease in the amount of federal aid needed for social programs

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS
There are no perceived risks or discomforts for participating in this research study. Should you experience any discomfort please inform the researcher, you have the right to quit any study procedures at any time at no consequence.

COMPENSATION
No compensation will be offered for participation in this study.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES
There are no alternative procedures offered for this study. However, you can elect not to participate in the study or quit at any time at no consequence.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of this signed consent form and all data collected including transcriptions/tapes from this study, will be stored in University Hall 544 at UTA for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway; it will be anonymous. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review

2

IRB Approval Date:

APPROVED

MAR 0 5 2013   JAN 2 8 2014

IRB Expiration Date:

Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Document
For Parents, Administrators, and Judges

Board to review your research records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS
Questions about this research study may be directed to:

Veronica Cole
972-849-1495
Veronica.cole@mavs.uta.edu

Dr. Maria Martinez-Cosio
817-272-3302
mcosio@uta.edu

Any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

_____
Signature and printed name of principal investigator or person obtaining consent   **Date**

CONSENT
By signing below, you confirm that you are 18 years of age or older and have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. Your signature confirms that you understand that, while this project has been reviewed by the Dallas Independent School District, Dallas ISD is not conducting the project activities.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

_____
SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER   **DATE**

APPROVED

3

IRB Approval Date:

MAR 0 5 2013

JAN 2 8 2014

IRB Expiration Date:

Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PARENTS

Parent Interview Questions

1.   What district does your child attend?

2.   How long has your child attended that district?

3.   What school districts has your child attended previously?

4.   What is your child's grade level?

5.   How old is your child?

6.   What is the race/ethnicity of your child?

7.   How helpful was the truancy reduction program to your child?

8.   Did the truancy reduction program help your child stay in school?

9.   Did the truancy reduction program improve your child's grades?

10.   What elements of the school district's truancy reduction efforts have been most beneficial for your child? Why?

11.   What elements of the school district's truancy reduction efforts have been ineffective for your child? Why?

12.   Are there any elements that you would like to see added to the district's truancy initiatives? If so, what?

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR JUDGES, NON-PROFIT ADMINISTRATORS,
AND PRINCIPALS

Protocol:

1. What is your specific title and job responsibilities?

2. Describe your background for your current position including your educational experiences, job experiences, or special training.

3. How many years have you been a part of the truancy reduction program?

4. How does your program define student success?

5. What are the goals of the truancy reduction program?

6. What are the major components of your truancy reduction program?

7. Are there any organizations or agencies that you partner with? If yes, what are they and what services do they provide?

8. What is the history and some of the contextual factors involving the creation of the truancy program?

9. In your opinion, what are characteristics of an effective truancy reduction program? Why?

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The author, Veronica Natasha Cole, was born March 2, 1984, in Dallas, Texas, to Glenn and Earnestine Cole.

Ms. Cole graduated a year early from Rockwall High School, in Rockwall, Texas, in 2001. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Texas Woman's University in 2005 and two Master of Arts degrees, one in Government and the other in Teaching from Texas Woman's University in 2008 and 2010. While working on her undergraduate degree at Texas Woman's University, Ms. Cole was a member of Dr. Karen Jackson's research team which utilized surveys to determine optimal academic advising styles. She also interned at the Office of Senator Royce West and at the Law Enforcement Management Institute (LEMIT) under the direction of Dr. Jim Alexander and Dr. David Bugg. As an intern at the Office of Senator Royce West, Ms. Cole was responsible for actively observing the law-making process and the interpretation of laws, processing applications for the "Conrad Leadership Program," founded by Senator West, researching controversial issues and laws (i.e.: top 10% law and social security), and engaging in social work concerning child protective services, child support, social security, discrimination, and inmate transfers due to hardship. During her time at LEMIT, Ms. Cole worked closely with police officers and professors, to gain insight into the field of law enforcement.

Ms. Cole's career as a professional educator began in 2010 and has continued to the present. As an employee of the Richardson Independent School District, Ms. Cole taught for one year at Lake Highlands High School and three years at Berkner High School. Her professional affiliations include: The Texas Alliance for Geographic Education, World Affairs Council, and Pi Lambda Theta. In her spare time, Ms. Cole enjoys traveling, reading, and spending time with family and friends.