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Attendance and Reading Gains: Marshall University Summer Enrichment Program

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Attendance and Reading Gains: Marshall University Summer Enrichment Program

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if attendance has any influence on student success during the Marshall University Summer Enrichment Program. This study compared student's daily attendance records to gains in reading. Students were divided into two groups, those who missed no more than 2 days and those who missed 3 or more days. Missing no more than 2 days has been the traditional description in this setting for the program completion certificates. Running record reading probes were used to identify the student's gain in reading skills. The data were analyzed using the Chi-Square test to determine the effect of high and low attendance on gains in reading. There was a significant effect of attendance on reading gain. Excluding the mandatory attendance group, the mean gain for high attendance was 2.08 while the mean gain for low attendance was 1.75.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....2

Table of Contents.....3

Literature Review.....4-8

Methods.....9

 Participants:.....

 Instrumentation:.....

 Procedure:.....

Results.....10

Discussion.....11-12

Implications.....13-14

References.....15-16

Table I. Raw Data.....17

Attendance and Reading Gains: Marshall University Summer Enrichment Program

Does attendance influence the outcome and quality of a student's education? Are children with good attendance records exposed to a more beneficial experience during primary school? This study and research is based on the previous questions. Regular attendance would appear to be the staple of student success. Attendance has a positive and significant influence on student performance (Lamid, 1996). Student achievement is affected in a negative way by absenteeism (Dekalb, 1999).

A strong positive relationship between student success based on the Ohio Proficiency Tests and attendance records has been reported (Roby, 2004). In the fourth grade the student's with attendance records ranked in the top ten percent scored an average of 96.46 percent on the proficiency test. Students with attendance records in the bottom ten percent averaged 92.75 percent on the proficiency test. Grades sixth, ninth, and twelfth yielded the same results. The ninth grade level had the most significant relationship between attendance and achievement (Ruby, 2004). The correlation between attendance and achievement was moderate to strong for all other grade levels. This study placed great weight on the loss of learning time and the student's ability to perform at a consistently successful rate. Students who attend school regularly perform better on standardized tests and daily schoolwork.

What does the word attendance mean? The word attendance referred to being present. A student's mere presence enhances the chance to excel. A student's entire career begins with simply being present in class. Low attendance can create a snowball effect for failure. When a student begins missing several days of class this usually leads

to a noticeable decline in work productivity. Poor work results in bad grades and can lead to retention. Students with bad grades believe they are not able to achieve as well as their peers. This can ultimately lead to drop outs and a decrease in graduation rates. Students may drop out of school because of alienation and failure, problems getting along with teachers, suspensions, retention, disliking school, pregnancy, financial responsibilities, and employment. Although the problem of dropping out of school has drawn a great deal more attention than truancy, research on dropouts points to the need for schools to address problems with student attendance effecting achievement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Normal attendance can create the opposite effect, often improving the students' self image when they receive good grades, complete schoolwork, become involved in extracurricular activities, and ultimately increase graduation rates.

Poor academic performance is the single strongest school-related predictor of dropping out (Hess, 1987; Wood, 1994). As stated previously, poor academic performance is directly related to poor attendance. Parents play a crucial role in keeping young people in school (Horn, 1992). The degree and nature of family support are determined by several factors including a stressful or unstable home life, socioeconomic status, siblings, poor education of parents, single-parent household, and a primary language other than English (Horn, 1992). Encouraging attendance must begin in the home. Students need to be motivated outside of school as well as inside of school. Several programs have been initiated to tackle the unsuccessful student. In Atlanta, Georgia since 1983, Adopt-A-Student has been operating. This program paired business volunteers as mentors with low-achieving high school juniors and seniors in a career-oriented support system. This outside enforcement helps students focus on the future and

resulted in an increase in the graduation rate compared to students not involved in the program (Dryfoos, 1990).

Project Coffee in Oxford, Massachusetts is another pioneer program designed to deter dropouts. Students involved in Project Coffee experience comprehensive vocational instruction, integration of academics and occupational training, counseling, job training, work experience, and a school-business and industry partnership. This program improved attendance, increased basic skills competencies, and lowered the dropout rate (Orr, 1987).

Programs like the two mentioned above boost students confidence and help more students to achieve. Children and teens need a healthy and stable support system to keep them on the right track. A student's home is not always conducive to productivity; a program might be a close replacement for what is lacking in the home (Horn, 1992). Students need to have easy access to such programs.

George Washington Preparatory High School located in south-central Los Angeles began taking measures to counter absenteeism. Parents must attend workshops on how to help their children and must visit the schools at designated times. Teachers make calls to the home of absent students. During the 1985-86 school year absenteeism was less than 10 percent indicating an improvement in attendance (U.S. Department of Education 1993). More schools should implement harsher penalties for absenteeism and rewards for good attendance. Involving parents, such as George Washington Preparatory High School, does will send the message that attendance is mandatory. Parents and school officials can work together to build strong foundation for learning and student success. Students' views of themselves and their relationships with others change

markedly during the primary school years. With emerging cognitive abilities and more frequent evaluation in school, children begin to compare themselves more often to peers (Trawick-Smith, 2003). Students who have a sense of competence and attend school regularly are more likely to consider teacher feedback in both a positive and negative form.

Increasingly, parents and educators are also looking to summer as an extended learning season, particularly for students who struggle to meet academic goals during the nine-month school year. In particular, research about summer learning loss has promoted many schools to seek ways to halt the slide in student's skills or knowledge during the traditional vacation months. Researchers have found that this "summer slide" is not equal for all subjects, or for all learners. Learning losses are more pronounced for math facts and for spelling than for more conceptual areas, such as reading comprehension and problem solving (Cooper, 2001). Children from middle-class families show gains on reading achievement during the summer and children from lower-income families tend to lose ground in reading (Copper, 2001). By 2000, more than a quarter of the nation's school districts required summer school attendance of students who were not meeting standards for promotion (Mathews, 2000). Among the 50 largest districts, almost half now offer summer classes and many make attendance mandatory for students who are behind grade level (Harrington-Leuker, 2000). Helping to boost academic achievement and attendance is only one goal of summer programming. Many parents seek summer enrichment opportunities for their children in special interests such as music, sports, art, and technology. Parents also want summer enrichment programs to be safe, and provide their child with engaging activities.

In addition, summer programs can pose some challenges. If summer programs are designed to feel more like a regular school year, students may respond with spotty attendance or low motivation. If attendance is optional, summer programs may encounter high attrition and absentee rates (Cooper, 2000). On the other hand, if summer school attendance is mandatory for students who have failed to meet standards or satisfy course requirements, it can feel like punishment (Ediger, 2001). Districts that make summer programs mandatory for struggling students may find that the program does not result in lasting gains.

In summary, student attendance with success in school shows several important factors. First, low attendance can create a snowball effect for failure. Second, student's attendance issues need to be addressed early on. Third, students with poor attendance are directly related to poor academic performance. Finally, in the schools where students have attendance problems, teachers may need to involve families in reducing absenteeism. When parents and teachers work together, students have better school attendance and higher grades. Students need to be motivated outside of school as well as inside school.

Methods

Participants

Subjects for this study were students who attended the Marshall University Summer Enrichment Program (2005) held at Dunbar Intermediate. The total number consisted of 121 students. The average number of days missed for this group was 2.18. Forty-Nine students had completed pre and post reading records the first and last week of the program. The average number of days missed for this group was 1.89. Students came from multiple backgrounds, different socioeconomic levels, and varying disabilities. Some of the students had previously attended an alternative school. Those students (n=10) were required to attend. If they missed more than 2 days they were to be dropped from the program and not promoted in their home school. The other students were encouraged but not required to attend.

Instrumentation

Using a running reading record taken week 1 and repeated week 6, students reading gains were computed. Administration of the running record consisted of the students orally reading a pre-leveled, designated reading probe. During the read aloud, the administrator would check for accurate readings, errors, and self-corrections. The running record probes were administered to each student on a weekly basis.

Procedure

To measure the reading gain against attendance, the daily attendance records for students (n=49) with a gain score divided into two groups, those missing 2 or less days (n=37) and those missing more than 2 days (n=12). Attendance began on June 27, 2005 and ended on July 28, 2005, covering a total of 18 days.

Results

Overall the program results determined that attendance did have an effect on reading gain scores. Out of the forty-nine students, twenty-two students with high attendance had above average gains in reading (more than 1.5 levels of change). Fifteen students with high attendance had average gains in reading (1 or no levels of change). Three students with low attendance (3 or more days missed) had above average gains in reading, and nine students with low attendance had average gains in reading. Results of this study reflected a significant effect of attendance on reading gains (Chi-Square= 4.31, $p < 0.05$). The mean gain for low attendance was 1.75 where the mean gain for high attendance was 1.46. Since the direction of effect was not as expected further analysis was necessary.

The mandatory attendance group from an alternative school ($n=7$) were removed from the statistical sample. Attendance was still significantly related to reading gain, (Chi-Square=6.04, $p < 0.05$), but in the expected direction. The mean gain for high attendance was 2.08 and the mean gain for low attendance was 1.75.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrated that attendance was significantly related to reading gain during a six-week summer enrichment program. Overall, it appears that the Marshall University Graduate College Summer Program was successful in raising individual student reading achievement, with high and low attendance being a factor in the successful outcome of the 42-student sample used in this study. Students who attended most days were able to make above average or average reading gains. There was not a decline in the level of reading from the pre to post running reading records. Students either stayed the same or showed improvement. This study supports that summer school prevented the “summer slide” and a decline in reading skills referenced in the literature (Cooper, 2001).

Overall, more students with high attendance made above average gains in reading. Of the 49 total-student sample, 37 students had high attendance and 12 students had low attendance. When doing a further analysis excluding the mandatory attendance group, 31 students had high attendance and 11 students had low attendance equaling a total student sample of 42. The rationale for removing the mandatory attendance group from the statistical sample was that they were not free to vary in attendance. The mandatory attendance may have also affected their attitude as reported by (Ediger, 2001). However, in this sample negative attitudes did not appear to be present in the way they responded to the program or to home schools’ program. All of the students in the mandatory attendance group were promoted and returned to their home school. All of these students met the criteria to be high risk for dropout, but had at least a minimally successful year

after completing the summer program. This is an example of how summer school programs may help to decrease drop out rates for at-risk students.

The results of this study indicate that students who missed 2 or less days during the summer program in 2005 did make above average (more than 1.5 levels of change) reading gains. The data collected from the attendance records and reading scores, indicate that regular attendance and those with days missed did influence student's success during the Marshall University Summer Enrichment Program. The results of this study agree with the literature in the positive relationship between student success and attendance. Students who attend school regularly should perform better on tests and daily schoolwork.

Research studies indicated mandatory attendance influenced self-confidence, interpersonal relationships, and increased basic skills competencies as well as graduation rates. Mandatory attendance may also affect attitude, which may impact on reading performance (Ediger, 2001). The students in the mandatory attendance group either maintained or improved their reading performance without any evidence of a negative effect on attitude. This provided support for keeping the mandatory attendance policy for this group of middle school children.

Implications

The purpose for this study was to determine if attendance had an influence on student success during the Marshall University Summer Enrichment Program. I became interested in knowing if students would attend a summer program, and would they benefit from attending the program regularly. The classroom that I was part of during the summer program included students who had to attend in order to be promoted to the next grade level. I became interested in knowing if this factor influenced how these students would perform over the next five weeks and would it change how they viewed the summer enrichment program. I was able to see how this summer program helped to increase the interest in attending school, without creating negative attitudes.

This study indicated that attendance did influence the gain in reading achievement, indicating that the summer program was successful in helping students to achieve above average or average gains in reading.

Yes, attendance strongly influences a student's ability to succeed. A firm educational basis begins with simply being present in class. Attendance gives students the edge needed to excel alongside peers. Low attendance often results in negative issues that can lead to dropouts. Programs designed to curb absenteeism are the force behind educating a better society. The Marshall University Graduate College Summer Enrichment Program is a great start to helping curb absenteeism and problems that can lead to dropouts. The Summer Program offered a place for students to feel welcome and be part of a safe learning environment. Students attended the program for the educational benefit, support, and encouragement from peers and staff. These are all positive issues that support decreasing student absenteeism and truancy in many schools across the

country. Attendance should improve when schools work together to involve the family and the community. Schools should also implement positive activities that support good or regular attendance with an effective home-school connection.

Next year the reading probes should be given a minimum of three times to determine whether the effect is linear or curve linear. An analysis by grade level should be possible if the data from both years are combined. The mandatory attendance only should be continued for grades 5-8. The reliability of the running reading record probes should be checked to determine if all raters score the probes the same way. A concurrent validity study comparing the running reading record score with a norm referenced reading achievement test should be completed.

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TABLE I. RAW DATA

GENDER	PRE	POST	CHANGE	GRADE	ABSENT
2.00	2.00	3.00	1.00	3	1.00
1.00	1.00	3.00	2.00	3	1.00
2.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	3	6.00
1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	3	4.00
1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	2	2.00
1.00	2.00	3.00	1.00	3	4.00
2.00	1.00	3.00	2.00	3	.00
2.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	3	.00
1.00	23.00	23.00	.00	5	.00
1.00	7.00	13.00	6.00	5	1.00
1.00	2.00	3.00	1.00	3	2.00
2.00	3.00	6.00	3.00	4	2.00
2.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	4	1.00
1.00	8.00	10.00	2.00	4	7.00
2.00	3.00	6.00	3.00	4	.00
1.00	3.00	6.00	3.00	4	1.00
1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	4	.00
1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	5	1.00
2.00	2.00	3.00	1.00	5	2.00
2.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	5	2.00
2.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	5	2.00
2.00	7.00	13.00	6.00	5	2.00
2.00	3.00	4.00	1.00	5	5.00
1.00	3.00	4.00	1.00	5	2.00
1.00	12.00	13.00	1.00	5	.00
1.00	12.00	13.00	1.00	5	7.00
2.00	7.00	8.00	1.00	5	.00
2.00	17.00	18.00	1.00	6	3.00
2.00	12.00	13.00	1.00	6	4.00
2.00	7.00	8.00	1.00	6	.00
2.00	7.00	12.00	5.00	6	3.00
2.00	17.00	18.00	1.00	6	5.00
2.00	18.00	18.00	.00	7	2.00
2.00	18.00	18.00	.00	9	.00
2.00	7.00	10.00	3.00	8	2.00
1.00	1.00	4.00	3.00	6	2.00
2.00	18.00	18.00	.00	6	.00
2.00	20.00	23.00	3.00	8	.00
2.00	20.00	20.00	.00	9	2.00
2.00	20.00	20.00	.00	9	2.00
2.00	20.00	20.00	.00	9	.00

