Chronic School Absenteeism in the Elementary Grades:

Contributing Factors, Interventions, and Outcomes

A MIXED–METHODS EVALUATION OF THE BE@SCHOOL COMMUNITY CASE MANAGEMENT INTERVENTION

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Executive Summary

During the 2013-2014 school year, there were 5,785 chronic absenteeism reports made to the Hennepin County Attorney's office (HCAO) for students, ages 5-11 years old. Since 2010, Hennepin County's response to chronic absenteeism across all grades has involved a multi-stage intervention model called be@school. This report presents the results of a year-long study that aims to increase the understanding of the nature of chronic absenteeism in the elementary grades among Hennepin County children and to evaluate one stage of the be@school model, the community case management intervention, by answering the following questions:

1. **What factors are related to school absenteeism for children in grades K-5 who are referred to the be@school program?**

2. **What are the key frameworks, components, strategies, and processes that make up the community agency caseworker intervention for families with children in grades K-5?**

3. **How do the supports and services provided by the be@school community caseworker fit with the identified factors related to school absenteeism for children in grades K-5?**

4. **What factors are associated with family engagement in the voluntary community agency caseworker intervention?**

5. **What is the relationship between participation in the community caseworker intervention and attendance outcomes?**

Methods

This study employed a sequential exploratory mixed methods design. Qualitative data was collected first, followed by quantitative data. The two types of data were analyzed separately and integration occurred at the point of interpretation and discussion.

Findings

<u>Question 1:</u> What factors contribute to school absenteeism for children in grades K-5 referred to be@school?

Factors contributing to absenteeism can be grouped by the social constructs of: 1) Broad based societal issues; 2) Community issues; 3) Relational issues; 4) family/personal issues.

- Broad Societal Issues:
    - ***Poverty and housing***
- Community Issues:
    - ***Cultural barriers and parent work schedules***
- Relational Issues of School and Family:
    - ***Lack of understanding of illness policies and of compulsory education laws as well as historical mistrust of schools***
- Personal/Family Issues:
    - ***Language barriers, transportation, lack of structure, mental health, parental substance abuse, large family size, relationship between child & school staff, family conflict***

<u>Question 2:</u> What framework, components, and strategies are involved in the be@school community worker intervention for families with children in grades K-5?

Families are referred to the be@school community case management intervention after they have received a second referral to be@school during the same school year (usually at nine absences or more). The be@school community agency case management intervention involves three primary processes: ***engagement, assessment, and provision of supports and services.***

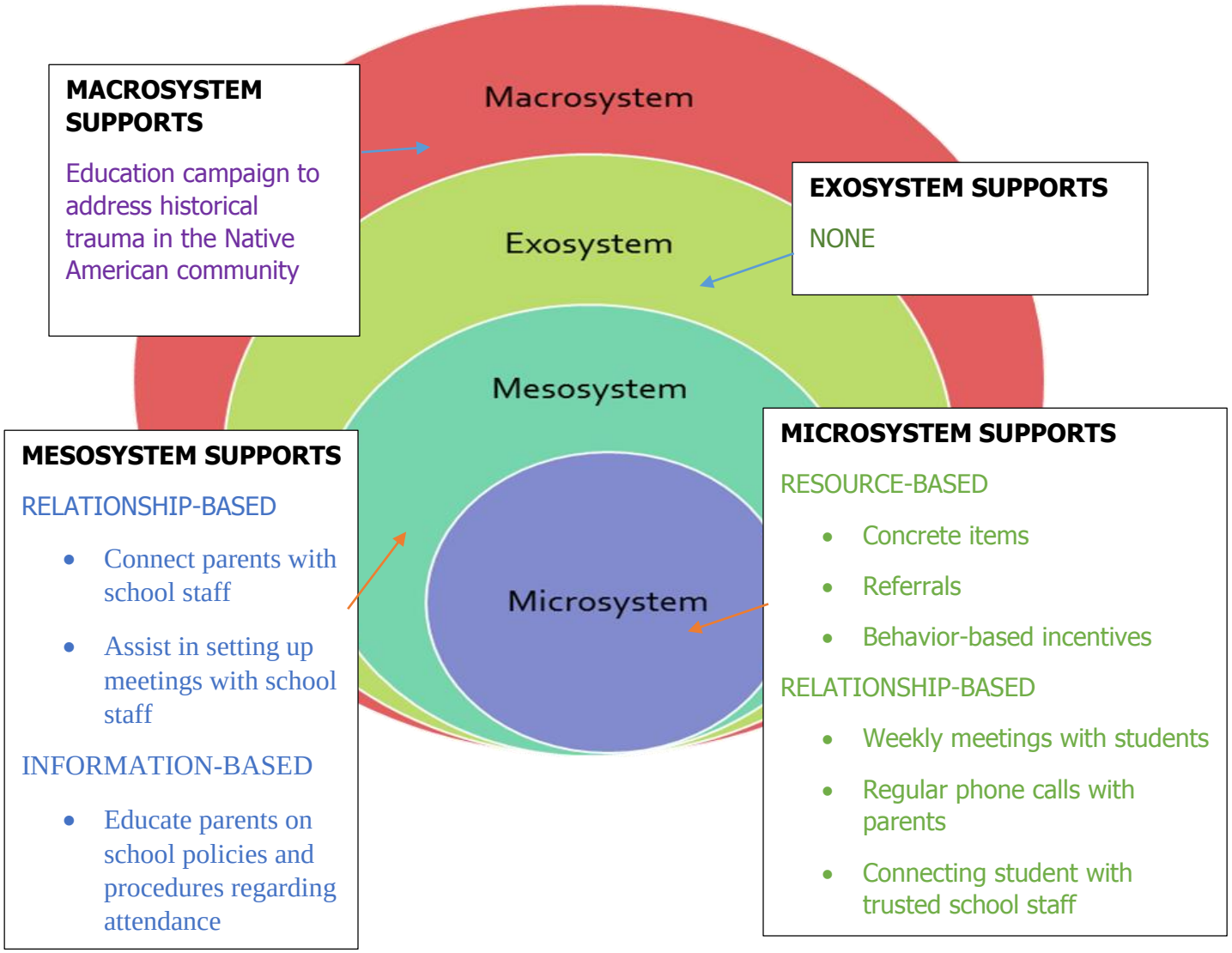

Figure 3. The ecology of supports and services provided by community caseworker.

Question #3: How do the supports and services provided by the be@school community agency caseworkers fit with the identified factors related to school absenteeism for children in grades K-5?

Comparison of Factors Contributing to Chronic Absenteeism in the Elementary Grades and the Supports and Services Provided by Community Agency Case Workers.

Ecological Level	Category	Contributing Factor	Support or Service
Microsystem	Resource-based	Housing	Referrals
		Transportation	Concrete items
		Mental health	Referrals
		Substance abuse	Referrals
	Relationship-based	Family size	Support with routines
		Family conflict	Supportive problem solving; Referral if needed; Trust-building; Weekly check-ins with child and parents; Incentive programs
		Child-teacher relationship	Facilitation of relationship and connection; trust-building
Mesosystem	Information-based	Lack of understanding of compulsory education laws	Providing education to parents on school policies and procedures Facilitating and increasing communication between parents and school staff
		Lack of understanding of importance of early education	
		Lack of understanding of attendance policies related to illness	

	Relationship-Based	History of negative school experiences	Facilitating and increasing communication between parents and school staff
Exosystem	Resource-based	Parent employment	**NONE**
Macrosystem	Resource-based	Poverty	**NONE**
	Relationship-based	Cultural conflicts	Addressing cultural trauma regarding the education system in the Native American community

Housing and transportation were identified as the most common factors that impact a student's attendance, but caseworkers reported they have very few resources to offer families who are struggling with these issues. The time limit of the caseworker intervention, 90 days, does not fit with complex ecology of a child's chronic absenteeism, potentially limiting the effectiveness of the case worker intervention. Finally, the be@school community caseworker intervention does not address the macrosystem level issue of poverty that workers identified as being a significant overarching factor for the majority of families on their caseloads, resulting in the supports and services provided by caseworkers functioning as short-term solutions but not leading to long-term change.

Question #4: What factors are associated with family engagement in the voluntary community agency case worker intervention?

HCAO defines engagement as a signed release of information (ROI) form from the family, consenting to their participation in the program. In the 2013-2014 school year, total engagement rates for the nine agencies that worked with elementary-aged children ranged from 14% – 69% for

students in grades K-5 only, with a mean engagement rate of 33% and median rate of 29.9%. The two main reasons that caseworkers gave for a family's lack of engagement were the inability to reach families and refusal of service.

- Race of student
  - African American = ↓ odds of engagement
  - Caucasian, Asian, and Hispanic = ↑ odds of engagement
- Agency assigned
  - Centro, Hmong American Partnership, & YMCA = ↑ odds of engagement
  - Phyllis Wheatley, Pillsbury = ↓ odds of engagement
  - Culturally-specific agencies = ↑ odds of engagement
  - Non-culturally specific agencies = ↓ odds of engagement

Question #5: What is the relationship between participation in the community caseworker intervention and attendance outcomes?

This evaluation was primarily formative in its focus rather than summative. However, because the goal of the be@school program is to improve student attendance, the research team felt it was important, as the elements of the community caseworker intervention were examined, to consider the attendance outcomes as they relate to participation in the intervention. For the purposes of this analysis, the outcome of "success" was operationalized as the absence of an additional referral to be@school for continuing absenteeism within the same calendar year. In other

words, students who were not re-referred to be@school after their initial referral to a community agency caseworker were deemed to have experienced success. The results of chi-square and logistic regression analysis found no statistically significant differences between the odds of success for students who did and did not participate in the be@school community caseworker intervention. Overall, 71–76% of students referred to the community caseworker intervention do not get referred to be@school for continued attendance problems, regardless of whether or not they actually engaged in the intervention.

Recommendations

The following section includes recommendations for improving the three main components of the community caseworker intervention (engagement, assessment, and supports and services provided) and specific recommendations regarding some technological improvements that could be made at Hennepin County to improve the program and future evaluations.

ENGAGEMENT

1. ***Improve access to correct contact information prior to referring a family to the community case workers.***
2. ***Keep the ratio of caseworker to caseload at no higher than 1:150 (as a yearly total).***
3. ***Continue to contract with culturally specific agencies and prioritize referring students to these agencies when appropriate.***
4. ***Further investigate and tap into the skills of the agencies that have very high engagement rates.***
5. ***Build relationships among school staff, HCAO staff, and community agency staff.***

ASSESSMENT

6. ***Further explore possible use of an assessment or screening tool.***

SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

7. ***Increase the intervention time limit***.
8. ***Empower parents to be active in their child's educational experience.***

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IMPORVEMENT NEEDS IN HCAO

9. ***Make reason for case closure a required field in BASIL***.
10. ***Require caseworkers to enter into BASIL the specific strategies and activities they are engaging in***.
11. ***Provide training to caseworkers on the importance of entering attendance barriers into BASIL.***

Introduction

Chronic absenteeism from school is typically defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year (Chang & Romero, 2008). Although chronic absenteeism is frequently discussed as a problem for secondary students, researchers, policy makers, and educational leaders are beginning to more closely examine the issue among elementary-aged students, defined here as students in grades K–5 (Carroll, 2013; Thornton, Darmody, & McCoy, 2013; Bickelhaupt, 2011; Blazer, 2011; Rhodes, Thomas, Lemieux, Cain, & Guin, 2010; Sparks, 2010; Chang & Romero, 2008; Romero & Lee, 2008,2007; Gandy, 2007; McCluskey, Bynum, & Patchin, 2004; Thornton, Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004; Grooters, 2002). One reason that chronic absenteeism in the early grades has been garnering more attention is that the incidence rates are quite high (Sparks, 2010). The National Center for Children in Poverty, using nationwide data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort, found that over 11% of children in kindergarten and nine percent of children in first grade are chronically absent (Chang & Romero, 2008). The authors of this same study also found a wide variation in absentee rates across and within school districts, ranging from five to 25% for students enrolled in kindergarten through third grade (Chang & Romero, 2008).

In addition to high incidence rates, the long-term impacts of poor attendance in the elementary grades has contributed to increased attention to this issue. Research has shown that chronic absenteeism in kindergarten and first grade is associated with lower academic achievement in later grades (Blazer, 2011; Chang & Romero, 2008; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004), particularly for low-income children (Chang & Romero, 2008). Chronic absenteeism in elementary school has been found to be predictive of chronic absenteeism in later grades (Blazer, 2011; Romero & Lee, 2007) and high school drop-out rates (Blazer, 2011; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Chronic absenteeism in elementary-aged children is also a significant problem in Hennepin County. During the 2013-2014 school year, there were 5,785 chronic absenteeism reports made to the HCAO for students, ages 5–11 years old. In an attempt to reduce chronic absenteeism in grades K–12, the Hennepin County Attorney's office, beginning in January 2010, initiated a collaborative program involving school systems and non-profit community agencies, called be@school.

Be@school is designed to provide different levels of intervention and support, depending on the severity of the absenteeism. If a student reaches three days of unexcused absences, the school is directed to mail a letter to the parents from the principal, explaining compulsory attendance laws, school district policies regarding excused and unexcused absences, and consequences of continued absenteeism. When a student has six unexcused absences, the school makes a referral to the HCAO. Upon receiving a referral, HCAO staff send a letter to the family, informing them of the compulsory school attendance laws and inviting them to a Parent Group Meeting (PGM). A PGM, the first level of the be@school intervention, is a multiple-family meeting in which HCAO staff (a social worker or attorney) explain attendance laws, consequences of continued absences, and services available to the families. The PGMs are held on weekdays or evenings at a public location, such as a library, school, or community center. Attendance at PGMs is optional for families.

If a child receives three additional unexcused absences (nine total), the school reports the student to the HCAO again. This is the second level of intervention: The HCAO sends a referral to a participating community agency and a caseworker from that agency attempts to contact the family. If contact with the family is made, the caseworker invites the family to participate in the case management piece of the be@school program and explains some of the resources and supports that they are eligible to receive. If the family agrees to participate, the caseworker schedules a meeting with the parents, conducts an initial assessment, and then has 90 days in which they can work with

the family to improve the child's attendance. Participation in this part of the be@school program is also optional and voluntary for the family.

If a child receives six additional unexcused absences (15 total), the school refers the family to the HCAO again, and, if the child is under the age of 12, the case is immediately sent to the child protection services intake unit for possible child protection assessment – the third level of intervention. If the child is over age 12, the case is sent to an HCAO truancy attorney for possible court petition. At 22 days total of unexcused absences, the HCAO and child protection workers collaborate to determine if a court petition or additional services are needed.

Impetus for Current Evaluation

The overall goal of the be@school program is to reduce the rates of absenteeism for children and youth in Hennepin County. During the 2010–11 school year, an outcome evaluation was conducted on the be@school program by the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement at the University of Minnesota (Daugherty & Sheldon, 2012) to determine how effective be@school was at meeting this goal. The data analyzed included students in grades K–12. The researchers found a significant reduction in the average unexcused absence rate for students whose families participated in the PGM meetings (Daugherty & Sheldon, 2012). For families who worked with community caseworkers, no significant difference in pre- and post-intervention absence rates were found (Daugherty & Sheldon, 2012). However, a secondary analysis comparing the overall total number of unexcused absences for the 2010–2011 school year for students whose families participated in a PGM meeting, students (and their families) who worked with a community agency caseworker, and students referred to the program whose families did not participate in either intervention, produced different results (Sheldon & Daugherty, 2013). However, a secondary analysis comparing the overall total number of unexcused absences for the 2010–2011 school

year for students participating in a PGM meeting, students working with a community agency case worker, and students referred to the program who did not participate in either intervention, produced different results (Sheldon & Daugherty, 2013). In this analysis, there was no statistically significant difference in the total number of unexcused absences between students whose families participated in a PGM and referred students whose families did not participate (Sheldon & Daugherty, 2013). However, a statistically significant difference *was* found between the total number of unexcused absences for students who worked with a community agency caseworker and students referred who did not participate (Sheldon & Daugherty, 2013).

The mixed results from the be@school evaluation (Daugherty & Sheldon, 2012; Sheldon & Daugherty, 2013) are not unlike the findings from evaluations of other case management-based intervention programs for school absenteeism. An evaluation of the Truancy Assessment and Service Center's (TASC) model, which operates across the state of Louisiana and involves intensive case management for families whose children are chronically absent and have been assessed as being high risk for future negative outcomes, found that the model was less effective the higher the student's risk score (Thomas, Lemieux, Rhodes, & Vlosky, 2011). For a student participating in TASC with a risk score of 27 (the cut-off point for "high risk" classification on a scale of 10–110), the increase in attendance post-intervention was 6%, while a student scoring 42 showed only a 2% increase in attendance (Thomas et al., 2011). Students whose risk scores were two standard deviations above the "high risk" cut-off score actually showed a decrease in attendance post-intervention (Thomas et al., 2011). Mixed results were also found in an evaluation of another case management-based model, the Early Truancy Initiative (McCluskey, Bynum, & Patchin, 2004). Results of this program showed statistically significant improvements in attendance rates for

students who received warning letters but not for students who were referred to social service agencies for case management and services (McCluskey et al., 2004).

Overall, the current literature on effective interventions for chronic absenteeism in elementary-aged students is significantly limited (Maynard et al., 2012), both in the number of studies that have attempted to evaluate interventions and in the number of studies that have actually identified even marginally effective interventions. A Campbell Collaboration Systematic Review of interventions for chronic absenteeism in elementary, middle, and high schools found that across the 28 studies reviewed, attendance improved by an average of 4.69 days at post-test but in the majority of studies, the mean rates of attendance at post-test were still below 90%, the typical definition for chronic absenteeism (Maynard, McCrea, Pigott, & Kelly, 2012). No moderating effects were found for study characteristics, participant characteristics, or intervention characteristics (Maynard et al., 2012). No differences in effect size were found among court-based, school-based, or community-based interventions (Maynard et al., 2012). The authors concluded that the data show that a wide variety of truancy interventions will lead to an improvement in attendance rates, but that none of the current models are able to improve attendance to an acceptable level (Maynard et al., 2012).

Using the results of the previous evaluation of be@school and evaluations of other case management-based models in the published literature to draw conclusions about their effectiveness in decreasing school absenteeism should be done with caution as very little is known about the specific frameworks, components, strategies, and processes of the interventions themselves. In their Campbell Systematic Review of interventions for chronic absenteeism, Maynard et al. (2012) noted that, "the majority of studies ... lacked adequate descriptions of the interventions, making replication of the intervention difficult." The authors were referring specifically to difficulties of replication for

research, but the lack of specific details regarding interventions results in little useful information for schools, community agencies, and local jurisdictions attempting to address this problem.

In addition to the lack of clarity on the interventions being studied, much of the current literature on the effectiveness of interventions for school absenteeism, including the previous be@school evaluation (Daugherty & Sheldon, 2012; Sheldon & Daugherty, 2013), neglects to identify any of the factors contributing to the poor attendance *of the students in their studies* (Grooters & Faidley, 2002; Lawrence et al, 2011; McClusky, et al., 2004; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004; Thomas et al., 2011). Due to this omission, it is difficult to know if an intervention was only modestly successful because the intervention itself was problematic or because it was not a good fit with the underlying causes of the absenteeism, or both.

In response to these gaps in the literature and the inconclusive results from the previous be@school evaluation, the following report presents the results of a formative evaluation of be@school that attempts to answer the following questions:

1. **What factors are related to school absenteeism for children in grades K–5 who are referred to the be@school program?**
2. **What are the key frameworks, components, strategies, and processes that make up the community agency caseworker intervention for families with children in grades K–5?**
3. **How do the supports and services provided by the be@school community case worker fit with the identified factors related to school absenteeism for children in grades K–5?**
4. **What factors are associated with family engagement in the voluntary community agency caseworker intervention?**

5. **What is the relationship between participation in the community caseworker intervention and attendance outcomes?**

Methods

Design

This study employed a sequential exploratory mixed methods design. Qualitative data was collected first, followed by quantitative data. The two types of data were analyzed separately and integration occurred at the point of interpretation and discussion.

Participants

Qualitative sample. Participants in the qualitative portion of the study were chosen using purposive sampling and included caseworkers and supervisors employed at each of the nine community-based agencies contracted with be@school who serve families with students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Some of these agencies also serve families with older students but they were directed to only consider younger students in the interviews. A total of 15 caseworkers and eight supervisors participated in the study. Six of the agencies only had one caseworker and in two of those agencies the caseworker was also the supervisor. One agency had two program supervisors and the rest each had one. Twelve of the 15 workers were female and three were male; the supervisors were split evenly by gender, four males and four females. Depending on the agency, caseworkers had either an associate's, bachelor's, or master's degree, mostly in human services-related fields, and three to 20 years of experience with case management and/or youth work.

Community agency caseworkers and supervisors were chosen for this study for two main reasons: (1) as the providers of the case management intervention, they could provide the most information on the specifics of this intervention and the factors they see impacting chronic absenteeism, and (2) gaining access to community agency staff was fairly easy both in terms of Institutional Review Board approval and logistics of contacting and scheduling as they are in regular

contact with the HCAO. In comparison, access to school staff and parents would have been more challenging and taken more time, making them a better fit for later stages of evaluation.

Quantitative sample. The quantitative analysis included 1,369 students in grades K–5 who attended one of 95 public and charter schools in Hennepin County in 2013–2014 and who were referred to the be@school program for the community caseworker intervention. (Assignment to the community caseworker intervention occurs at the time of a student's second referral to the HCAO for absenteeism.) Twenty-nine students were excluded from the final sample due to missing information in the dataset regarding whether or not a release of information was received (the proxy measure for participation in the community caseworker intervention). In addition, in 14 cases agencies not included in the qualitative analysis were listed as the assigned agency, including Check & Connect (n = 2), Hennepin County (n = 1), Lutheran Social Services (n = 1), and the Legal Rights Center (n = 10). These cases were excluded because these agencies either rarely work with students in K–5 or are using an intervention model different than the caseworker model being studied in this analysis. Students who were listed as multi-ethnic (n = 5), other (n = 3), and unknown (n = 3) were also excluded from the sample due to their small sizes making statistical analysis problematic, resulting in a final sample of 1,318 students.

The sample included 806 African American students (61.2%), 207 American Indian students (15.7%), 174 Caucasian students (13.2%), 99 Hispanic students (7.5%), and 32 Asian students (2.4%). It was fairly equally divided between males (n = 686, 52%) and females (n = 632, 48%). The majority of students were in the youngest three grades: kindergarten (n = 328, 24.9%), first grade (n = 286, 21.7%), and second grade (n = 204, 15.5%), with the remaining spread fairly equally among the upper three grades: third grade (n = 179, 13.6%), fourth grade (n = 154, 11.7%), and fifth grade (n = 167, 12.7%). Just over 80 percent (83.2%) of the sample (n = 1,097) were referred from the

Minneapolis Public Schools. The next highest referring district was Osseo, with 5.1% of the sample (n = 67). All other districts referred between 1 and 35 students.

The sample was not representative of the population of students enrolled in grades K–5 in Hennepin County. African American and American Indian students were over-represented in the sample, while Caucasian, Asian, and Hispanic students were under-represented in the sample, reflecting racial disproportionality in either the occurrence of unexcused school absenteeism or in reporting of unexcused school absenteeism to the HCAO.

Procedures

Literature review. An extensive literature review was conducted on factors associated with chronic absenteeism and interventions to address chronic absenteeism, focusing on children in the elementary grades. Information from the literature review was used to provide background information on the problem and to develop a preliminary code book for the qualitative data.

Qualitative data collection. Prior to beginning the research project, approval was sought from the University of Minnesota's Institutional Review Board (IRB). While IRB approval was pending, an email was sent to supervisors at the community agencies, explaining the project and requesting assistance in scheduling interviews and focus groups with them and their staff. After IRB approval was granted under exempt status interviews and focus groups were conducted by the first author during November and December 2014. All interviews and focus groups (if the agency had more than one worker) were conducted using a semi-structured interview format (see Appendix A for list of questions). The first author used pre-planned questions to guide the discussion but participants were free to discuss other issues they deemed relevant. Supervisors were interviewed separately from caseworkers. The first author took notes during the interviews and focus groups, all

of which were recorded on a portable recording device and then transcribed by the first author. Copies of be@school and agency-specific assessment and intake forms were reviewed.

Quantitative data collection. Quantitative data was retrieved after completion of qualitative data collection. Data was provided by Scott Nelson, Principal IT Specialist for the HCAO, and George Diaz, be@school program paralegal, and retrieved from the BASIL database. A data file was provided with a list of barriers to attendance that caseworkers enter when reporting on a case and the aggregated frequency counts for each barrier. Another data file was provided with information on the name, age, grade, gender, race, referring school and district, agency assigned, and number of referrals to be@school for every student in grades K–12 referred to be@school during the 2013–2014 school year. From this data set, only students in grades K–5 who had been referred to the community caseworker intervention were included in the final sample. Once the final sample (n = 1,318) was created, the data were de-identified and a person key was kept by the principal investigator in an encrypted CD file in a locked filing cabinet.

Analysis

All interview and focus group transcripts were uploaded into NVivo. A list of a priori codes were created based on the literature review (see Appendix B for list of preliminary codes). During the first round of coding, additional codes were added as needed to capture ideas and themes that were not in the a priori code list. During the second round of coding, some codes were collapsed or expanded, broader themes and categories were established, and applicability of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory (1979) was noted (see Appendix C for final list of codes). Both rounds of coding were conducted by the first author. After the second round of coding, the second author reviewed all of the transcripts and checked the coding. No changes to the coding were made after the second author's review.

Analysis of quantitative data began after the qualitative analysis was completed. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to conduct statistical analyses, including chi-squares, logistic regressions, and correlations. Table 1 presents a summary of the analysis process.

Table 1

Summary of Data Analysis Process

Research Question	**Data**	**Analysis**
Question 1	Qualitative Interviews; Quantitative Data from BASIL	NVivo: Thematic coding with priori codes, codes derived from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory; codes developing from the data; barrier frequency report from BASIL
Question 2	Qualitative Interviews	NVivo: Thematic coding with a priori codes, codes derived from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory; codes developing from the data
Question 3	Qualitative Interviews	Comparison of data from Questions 1 & 2
Question 4	Quantitative Data from BASIL	SPSS: Chi-Squares; Logistic Regressions; Crosstabs; Correlations
Question 5	Quantitative Data from BASIL	SPSS: Crosstabs; Logistic Regressions; Chi-Squares

Results

<u>Question 1:</u> What factors contribute to school absenteeism for children in grades K–5 referred to be@school?

The Ecology of School Absenteeism

Throughout the process of interviewing, transcribing, coding, and analyzing the qualitative data from the community agency caseworkers, connections to Bronfenbrenner's original Ecological Systems Theory (1979) quickly became apparent. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was first introduced in the late 1970s and focused on the different environmental contexts that shape development across the lifespan (1979). Although in later iterations of this theory, Bronfenbrenner focused more on the interaction between the person and the environment and the developmental processes and outcomes that resulted from this interaction across the lifespan – what he referred to as the "process-person-context model" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009), his early work introduced different levels of environmental context that can be used to understand development: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, see Figure 1).

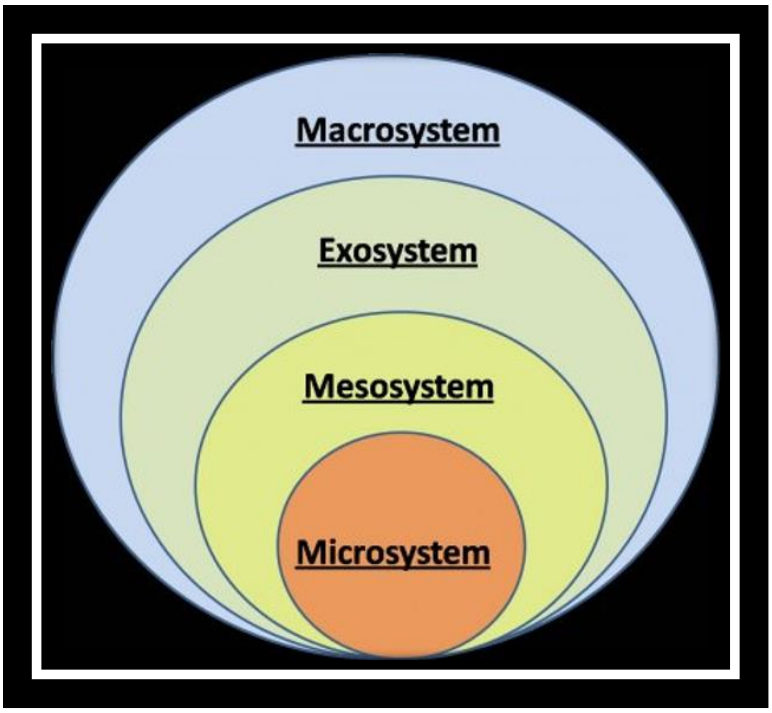

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979).

Although current research on the etiology of child maltreatment has focused on the application of both Bronfenbrenner's original theory as well as expansions on the theory, such as the ecological-transactional model (McKenzie, Kotch, & Lee, 2011), there has been limited application of ecological frameworks to chronic school absenteeism (Lynn & Colter, 2009) despite the fact that many jurisdictions, including Hennepin County, consider chronic school absenteeism a form of child maltreatment, referred to as "educational neglect."

Throughout this report, Bronfebrenner's original ecological systems theory (1979) will be used as a framework through which to discuss and analyze the multi-system complexity of chronic school absenteeism in elementary-aged children. Figure 2 shows a summary of the factors identified by community agency staff that contribute to chronic absenteeism as framed by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979).

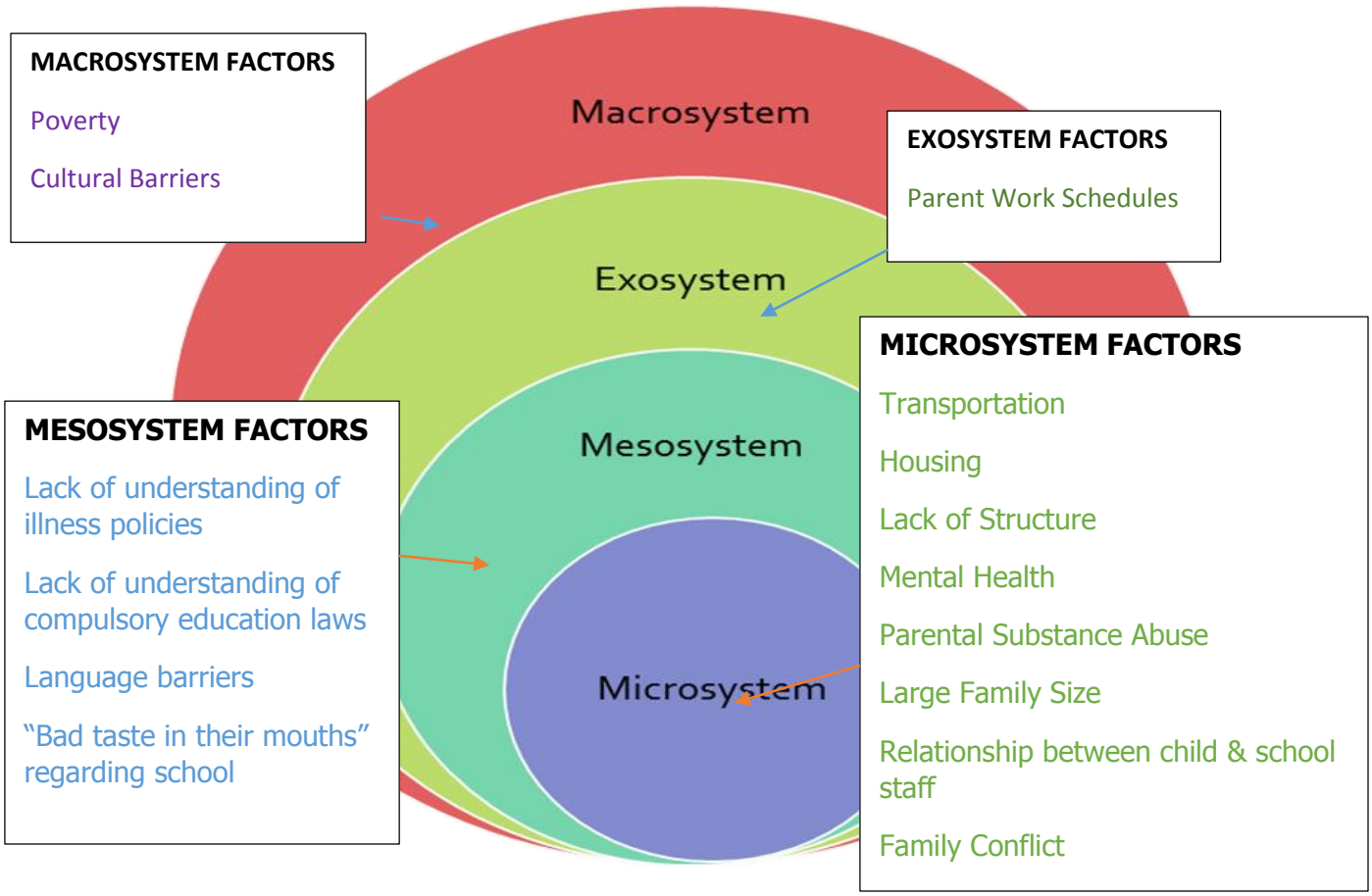

Figure 2. The ecology of chronic elementary school absenteeism in Hennepin County.

Microsystem level factors. Bronfenbrenner defines the microsystem as the contexts and relationships in which the individual directly interacts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For elementary age children, the most prominent microsystems are the family/home environment and the school. When asked to identify what issues they see as having the largest impact on school absenteeism for elementary-aged students, the majority of community agency workers interviewed first spoke about elements of the *family microsystem* that either directly impeded a child's ability to get to school or indirectly impacted the child's attendance by making it difficult for the family to prioritize getting their child to school on a regular basis, including homelessness and high mobility, lack of access to transportation, family conflict, parental substance abuse, parental or child mental health problems, and large family size.

Housing. The issue of housing arose as a dominant factor that has direct and indirect effects on school attendance. Workers reported that many of their students lacked stable housing and frequent moving made it difficult to maintain stable busing to and from the school. One worker reported, *"Sometimes they move but most parents don't think to contact the school before they move and it takes [the school] a week to schedule a new bus."* More prominently, workers discussed the indirect effect of homelessness and high mobility on a family's ability to make school attendance a priority. One worker articulated the situation by saying, *"Homelessness is a big piece. A lot of times families are at one residence and then a week later they're somewhere else. There are other things they place at a higher importance level than school, like finding a home, providing food and shelter for their family, versus the truancy part."* This sentiment was echoed by a different worker, who said, *"A lot of them are mobile. When they're homeless and highly mobile that becomes a big issue because I think the priority to send their child to school isn't a priority."*

Transportation. Along with housing difficulties, lack of transportation options was a frequently cited barrier by nearly all workers. According to workers, many families report missing the bus. Sometimes families miss the bus because they are running late and they have difficulty getting kids ready in the morning. However, workers also reported that sometimes the bus is missed because of problems with the bus arrival time, *"The school sends a postcard and says the bus is going to be there at 8:05 and the bus shows up at 7:55 or 8:35 and they are small kids and they're not going to be out there. Some of them have asthma or something,"* and *"Sometimes it's not them. The bus came a little earlier than it's supposed to, or later, so the kid is in between and misses the bus."* Regardless of why the bus was missed, once it is missed alternative ways to get to school are burdensome, either in terms of costs or time and coordination. One worker said, *"a lot of them have multiple children. They have smaller children, so if the student misses the bus ... they're either relying on a family member to help them or it's bundle up all my other children and we all have to take the bus to take my older child to school."* Workers generally expressed empathy for families in these situations, as one said, *"Parents have such limited resources ... no car, smaller siblings ... how*

are they going to take the kid to school with like three other little kids on the bus?" The problem can be compounded for students who attend city-wide magnet programs far from their neighborhoods: *"If they're young and they miss the bus, the parent is going to have to ride with them on the bus and there could be two or three transfers before they get to school and a lot of times they don't have money for public transportation so they don't get to school."* For many families involved in be@school, lack of transportation resources transforms a fairly common occurrence among school-age children (missing the bus on occasion) into a full-day absence from school.

Family conflict, substance abuse, family size. In addition to the dominant issues of housing and transportation, community agency workers described a number of other stressors in the family microsystem that they see indirectly impacting the child's school attendance. These stressors include family conflict: *"Sometimes the people inside the home say, 'Well, I get her up every day, fix breakfast every morning.' You ain't telling me what's going on at night. Y'all are yelling at each other, about ready to fight, police coming over here. There's other activity going on;"* parental substance abuse: *"I've definitely seen with some of our younger parents that they're drinking too much or living a lifestyle that is not conducive to sending their kids to school;" "A lot of times parents are out drinking or using drugs and they don't come home and the kids are up all night and they don't get up for school. I feel like I've run into that with a lot of them:"* and large family sizes: "*… some of the harder cases we've talked about … have a lot of kids … seven, eight kids. Part of it is in those situations parents are having some issues holding kids accountable, getting them up, getting them to school*" "*There are a lot of children in the family so the mother's trying to juggle who needs to go to school;*" "*I'm thinking about one family in particular … she has five children and every year one of her children starts [in the be@school program]. I think for her, she works with me, she gets back on track … then she has another child starting [school] and it's kind of the same. I think it's a struggle for her with each new child.*"

Mental health. A major stressor that was mentioned by the majority of workers is mental health issues of either the parent or the child. One worker said, "*I bet 90% of the cases [referred to*

be@school] are mental health – either both the parent and child, or just the child, or just the parent." Workers viewed mental health problems of parents as impacting a child's school attendance primarily by impacting the parent's ability to establish and enforce routines and provide the structure, support, and consistency needed for kids to attend school regularly. Children's mental health issues were viewed as impacting a child's ability to follow morning routines necessary to get to school regularly and to feel successful in the school setting.

Child-teacher relationship. In terms of the *school microsystem*, a few workers identified the relationship between the child and their teacher, specifically in terms of how the child feels the teacher treats or feels about him, as being a factor that influenced a child not coming to school. Workers said that when they ask children why they aren't going to school, they will say, *"I don't like my teacher. She doesn't listen to me."* or "*My brother used to go here last year* [and he had behavior issues at the school] *and I feel like my teacher is treating me the same way.*" One worker said, "*A lot of times I do hear kids say they don't like how they're treated at school so they don't want to go.*" However, in contrast, some workers said they believed that in most cases young children want to be at school. As one worker said emphatically, "*For the most part, they want to go to school. They want to go to school.*" But issues involving their family microsystem or issues in the mesosystem or exosystem (to be discussed in later sections) prevent them from attending regularly.

In an attempt to triangulate the data regarding barriers to school attendance, the information from the caseworker interviews was compared to information that workers enter into the HCAO's BASIL reporting system when they open a case. For students in grades K–5 during the 2013–2014 school year, 661 barriers were entered for the 343 opened cases. Consistent with what the caseworkers said in interviews, transportation was the second most common reported barrier (next to "other") in the BASIL system: It was cited in 14% of the cases from the 2013–2014 school year. Housing was next most common, cited in 10% of cases, followed by the child's physical health, cited

in 9% of cases. The most frequently cited barrier (24% of cases) was "other." The BASIL system allows for workers to choose "other" and enter case notes describing their reasons for using this code, but it does not allow for a feasible way to harvest this data for analysis.

Mesosystem level factors. The mesosystem refers to relationships among the different microsystems in which the child participates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). When discussing school absenteeism for young children, the two most salient microsystems are the school and the family, and problems in this mesosystem have been found to contribute to poor attendance (Thornton, 2013; Blazer, 2011; Chang & Romero, 2008). Interviews with community caseworkers identified communication difficulties resulting in lack of understanding between the two microsystems as the most problematic mesosystem factors impacting attendance.

Lack of understanding of importance and compulsory nature of early education. Workers from all the community agencies interviewed for this project spoke at length about difficulties with communication and a lack of understanding between parents and the school system. Three workers mentioned that, particularly in terms of young children in kindergarten and first grade, parents often either didn't understand compulsory attendance laws in Minnesota or, even if they knew it was the law, did not believe that missing days in kindergarten or first grade was a significant problem. One worker said, *"I've had some when they're really young, like kindergarten, and the families just don't get it. It's like, 'No, you can't be late to school. You're breaking the law.' Sometimes it's just a matter of 'This is the law. This is why it's done.' For some families it might be that this is the first time in the school, the first time in school in the U.S., whatever it might be, (they) just clearly don't understand expectations."* Workers who primarily support immigrant families also cited this lack of awareness and understanding of legal and cultural expectations for early education as being a factor. In regards to some of the Hmong

families she works with, one worker, who is Hmong herself, said, "*I think, like for kindergarteners, I think some parents think that kindergarten doesn't really matter. So if their child doesn't feel well that day, it's ok if they stay home. So sometimes it's not really understanding the importance of early education."* A worker in the Somali community said, *"I've noticed this is a pattern in the Somali community [to which the worker also belongs], for (kindergarten) and first graders, they don't understand the importance of what the law is. They'll say, 'It's below 10 degrees! That's ridiculous. How could you send a child to school?' "* The fact that the workers have to clarify these issues of school policy for parents suggests a breakdown in communication between the school and families.

Lack of understanding of school policies and processes. Families' lack of understanding of the rules around attendance when a child is ill and the process for how to get an excused absence for illness was another mesosystem level factor brought up by workers from five of the eight agencies. Some workers reported that parents are confused about which illnesses require a child to miss school and don't know what types of health supports are available at school, thus they keep them home for minor illnesses or illnesses that can be managed at school. One worker said, *"I think our families with younger kids, they need to understand, 'Your kid can go to school with a cough.' I've had some families in the past ... and they say, 'Oh, you're coughing, you shouldn't go to school. Sometimes it's like, 'I want to protect my kid. My kid has asthma,' and it'll be like, "No, you can have that [asthma] at school. They can help you.' "* A worker from a different agency raised the same issues: "*When is a child considered sick? A fever? A lot of families don't know that. When should I send them to school? If they have lice, can they go to school?*" It is unclear how schools are communicating about illness policies to families, but based on the experiences of be@school workers, it appears that for some families these communication attempts are not effective.

In addition to not knowing when to keep a child home from school for illness, be@school workers report that parents often don't know (or forget to inform the school) when their child does need to stay home due to illness, and then these illnesses are marked unexcused. As one worker said, *"Some parents think, 'If the school sent my kid home sick today and they're not going to go to school tomorrow [because they need to be fever free for 24 hours], they assume the school knows my kid is still sick,*" so they don't call the next day's absence in and it is marked unexcused. A few workers described situations in which they have checked a student's attendance record, noticed the child was absent, and then called the parent to inquire as to why the child was out. The parent will report to the worker that the child is home sick, but the parent never called the school to let them know, thus the absence is marked unexcused. It is unknown if school staff themselves ever make similar calls to inquire about absences and coach parents on the policies and procedures regarding illness-related absences.

For parents who have limited English language skills, communication with the school regarding a child's illness is particularly difficult. Workers report that for some of their Hmong and Somali speaking families, leaving and receiving messages about absences is overwhelming. One worker explained, regarding the Hmong families she works with, "*I think a lot of families ... are not really good at listening to messages and pressing numbers. So the message will say, 'Press this number to contact this person' and they're having challenges with that as well and not wanting to go through that hurdle because they don't know how to get to the right person.*" A worker who works with Somali families said that many of her families attempt to call in to the school when their child is sick but that the school personnel are unable to understand the voicemail, due to the limited language skills of the speaker, and thus just mark the student absent, or they confuse students who may have similar names and mark the wrong one absent.

Workers also reported that parents don't understand out-of-district school transfer policies: The family has to give permission to the new school to send out a record's request to the old school, otherwise the child continues to be marked absent at the old school. Parents also struggle with setting up busing after moving to a new address: The family must let the school know several weeks in advance to change the busing in order to not have a disruption in busing for that student. Parents are also unsure how tardiness is defined. (There is no such thing as a 10-minute grace period.) All of these things contribute to children missing school unnecessarily and/or accruing unexcused absences.

History of negative school experiences. In addition to a lack of communication between the school and families regarding important school policies and procedures, a few workers also reported families who, as one worker described it, *"have a bad taste in their mouth around school."* Workers discussed families in which the parents dropped out of school in ninth or tenth grade and don't have a positive history with schools, in general, or families who feel as if the *"the teacher is over-talking them or had some type of vendetta against their child."* Another worker shared a story about a mother whose child received special education services and the mother was very frustrated about her child's lack of progress at school: "*The families all want their kids in school. They want them to get an education and they're upset because their kid's in fifth grade and can't write their own name.*" Research on parent involvement in education has shown that feeling respected and valued by school staff is a prerequisite to parent involvement in their child's educational experience (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Mapp, 2003). Under this premise, it would not be surprising if the strained tenor of some of the family-school relationships described by the workers in this study contributes to parents not prioritizing their child's regular attendance at school.

Looking at the BASIL barriers report for the 2013–2014 school year, the mesosystem-level factor, "conflict with school," was cited in 2% of cases. However, there were no categories for other meso-system level factors, such as poor communication between family and school and lack of understanding of school policies and procedures.

Exosystem level factors. The exosystem contains settings in which the child does not participate but which have an impact on the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In terms of chronic school absenteeism, multiple workers cited parents' employment schedules and responsibilities as having a significant impact on the child's ability to get to school. Specifically, workers described parents who worked shifts that led them to be either asleep or out of the house when the children needed to get up and get ready for school. One worker said, "*I'm dealing with a lot of parents right now who work during the night, come home early, and the kid is in first or second grade and they're not going to wake up and go to school by themselves. Or some parents get home at like 2:00 (a.m.). You're going to sleep and you don't hear the alarm ringing. There are a lot of issues like that because of the employment of the parent and there's nobody there to help them.*" Some workers explained that due to tough economic conditions, parents often have no choice but to work a shift that conflicts with their child's morning routine, "*I've had families who have been really struggling to maintain a job so they'll be on overnight and then the kids are at the grandparents and then they have to go get them.*" One worker described the dilemma of a single mother who was sending her children to a school for which they did not qualify for busing, "*She's afraid to drive her kids to school because she works 12-hour overnight shifts and she's afraid she'll be too tired in the morning to drive them. If she doesn't work, she can't support her kids. She has to drive them back and forth so her work is getting in the way of her kids getting to school.*" Parents' employment was the fourth most common factor cited (8% of cases) in the 2013–2014 BASIL barriers report.

Macrosystem level factors. The macrosystem refers to the cultural, political, and economic environment in which the child lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Many of the factors identified by workers at the microsystem and exosystem level are related to the larger macrosystem. Issues like housing, lack of transportation, and limited parental employment options all relate to the economic and political system in which the families operate. When discussing these specific issues, most of the community agency workers seemed well aware of the larger macrosystem context, referring with empathy to the many barriers, struggles, and stressors faced by the families. One supervisor said, *"We can give referrals and help but it's kind of a bigger picture ... more of a poverty issue and policy issue*."

An additional macrosystem level issue for some children involves conflicts between the cultural contexts of their ethnic communities and that of the dominant majoritarian American society. For example, a supervisor who works with, and is a member of, the Native American community explained that the historical trauma of American Indian boarding schools impacts how members of the community today perceive and interact with educational institutions.

> "*I think it's important to understand how our history with institutionalized education is not good. I've heard people say, 'Well the boarding schools are over. Get over it.' They don't understand the generational effects of historical trauma, grief, and loss and boarding schools and how Native people have a love of learning but a distrust of institutions, but for a very good reason ... when we have relatives in our families that have been subjected to that, there are effects through the generations. We've got a lot of work to do with that. There is that general distrust*."

A worker in the Somali community explained that different culture understandings of time impact some of her Somali students' attendance records: "*For K–5 [students], a lot of it is because the parents are*

constantly running late. Being late is such a norm in our culture, but African time doesn't equal to American time so they don't understand that tardy is an unexcused absence."

The figure below (Figure 3) shows a summary of the factors related to chronic school absenteeism in each ecological systems level as identified by community agency staff.

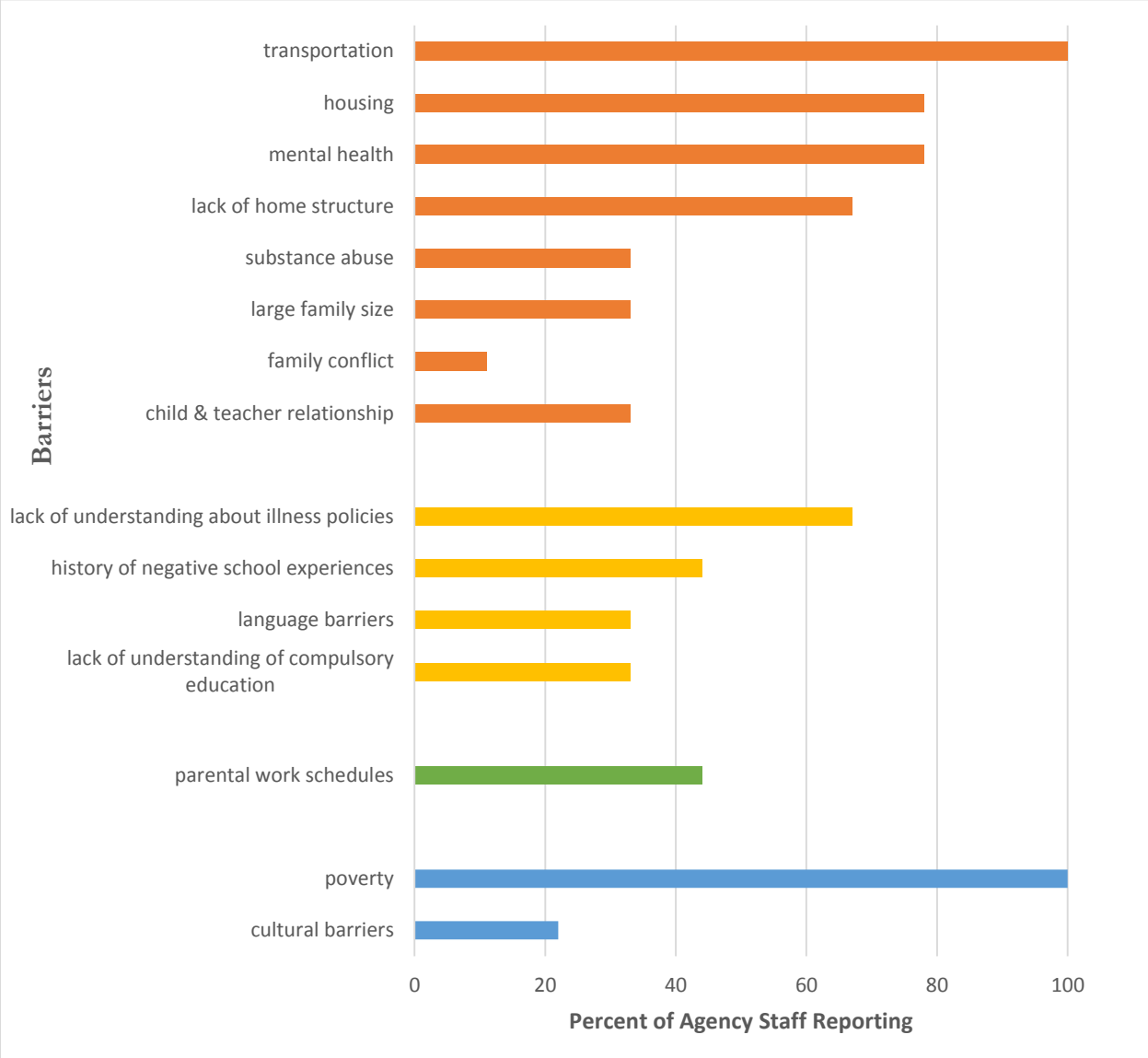

Figure 3. Barriers to school attendance for elementary-aged children in Hennepin County, as identified by be@school community agency staff.

<u>Question 2:</u> What framework, components, and strategies are involved in the be@school community worker intervention for families with children in grades K–5?

The be@school community agency case management intervention involves three primary processes: engagement, assessment, and provision of supports and services, each of which will be discussed below.

Engagement

Interviews with community agency staff revealed a similar basic engagement strategy existing across agencies. When a referral comes in from a school that is eligible for case management services, HCAO staff use the be@school computer system, BASIL, to enter in the information about the referral and assign it to a specific agency. Agency workers report checking BASIL daily. When a new referral comes in to an agency, the supervisor assigns it to a specific worker, if there are multiple be@school workers at the agency, or if there is only one worker, that worker knows to take the case. HCAO policy states that the agency must engage the family within 15 calendar days. If they are unable to engage the family within 15 days, they close the case. The worker attempts to make contact with the family, initially by phone, and then, if unsuccessful by phone, in person by home visit. Some agencies also send a letter to the family, explaining who they are and what the program is about, the day they receive the referral. HCAO requires that workers make three phone calls and a home visit in an attempt to engage a family before they can close the case for lack of response. If the agency makes all three phone calls and attempts a home visit within 15 days, they are reimbursed $50 from HCAO, even if the attempts at contact were unsuccessful.

From all the workers interviewed, the most common reason given for lack of engagement with a family is that the worker cannot reach them due to the contact information (phone and address) being incorrect. Workers who predominantly work with the Minneapolis Public Schools

estimated that between 75–90% of the referrals they receive include incorrect phone numbers and/or addresses. Workers expressed significant frustration with the incorrect information impeding their ability to engage families and taking a lot of time to attempt to resolve. One worker said, *"So you get this referral and half of the time they're incomplete. There's no phone number, the phone number doesn't work, there's no address or the wrong address, wrong phone number. Sometimes there's hardly any information listed that's any use to us. Sometimes the school's not even right on the form.*" The workers all said that when they have incorrect information, the first thing they do is contact the school the child attends to see if they have more updated information. The responsiveness of the schools varies. As one worker said, "*It depends on the school. Some schools hate this program and want nothing to do with it. Other schools are willing to work with you.*" Some workers said that some school employees don't realize they are authorized to release contact information to be@school staff and so they ask the worker to provide a release of information (ROI) signed by the family before they will provide updated contact information. But a worker cannot obtain a release from the family without the correct contact information. Other workers said that school staff are helpful, particularly if they know the worker and have a positive relationship with them, but that often they do not have current contact information for the families either. Workers said that many of the students referred are highly mobile making it difficult to keep contact information up to date. One worker said, "*Phone numbers change a lot. Some families change phone numbers every couple of weeks. Then you have to go back to the school and sometimes the school will say, 'The number I put in BASIL is the only one I have.'* " Another worker explained that school staff, who are busy with many other tasks, can take a long time to get back to them with correct contact information, and meanwhile the 15-day deadline is approaching. One supervisor said, "*Addresses and phone numbers are not always current for homeless and highly mobile families. Trying to get in touch with them is probably her [the worker's] most time-consuming issue.*"

In addition to incorrect contact information, another impediment to initially making contact with a family and engaging them is the high rate at which referrals arrive at agencies, especially during the spring. Workers and supervisors explained that a large number of referrals will come in at once (20 to 30 in a week, according to estimates by multiple workers; one supervisor told of receiving 94 in one week during the spring of 2014). With that many referrals, agency workers reported that it is difficult to find enough time to do all the extra research and digging in order to correct bad phone numbers and addresses. Thus, they may use the phone numbers they have (even if the numbers are no longer in service or are clearly incorrect) and do a home visit, but if that contact information is wrong, they will not have time to look for correct information and will close the case by day 15 in order to receive the reimbursement from the HCAO.

If the agency worker is able to make contact with a parent on the phone, they explain who they are and that they received a referral from Hennepin County about the child missing a certain number of days of school. The worker then describes what the be@school program is, lets the parents know about some of the supports and services they can provide, and asks the parent if they would be willing to set up an intake meeting. A few supervisors and workers stressed the importance of making it clear that they are not an employee of Hennepin County, but work for a community agency. One supervisor said, "*We really highlight that we're from [agency name] and not the County. That really opens up more doors for us.*" Another refers to herself as "a family advocate." She said, "*I stress that I'm a family advocate which makes me more on their side than on Hennepin County's side. More often than not, they'll be happy to have the service.*" A different worker refers to herself as *"an advocate at a community center – because I kind of want to put that parent at ease so they'll open up a little and talk to me*." Workers who work primarily with immigrant families described the level of alarm that families feel when they receive a letter from Hennepin County, either because they are undocumented and are worried about immigration issues, or because they are unfamiliar with how the county system works

and are concerned about significant consequences for them or their child. These workers said that their first job is to be clear that they work for an agency, not the county. They reassure families that this will not impact their immigration status, and then they discuss the benefits of the program.

Some workers and supervisors compared the initial phone call to the family to a sales call, in which the goal is to convince the families to agree to an intake meeting by explaining all of the supports and services that they will be able to provide not just the child but the whole family. One supervisor said the skills needed to be effective at engaging are "*almost like sales skills. I really try to look for that when I hire somebody.*" Another supervisor described her most effective worker as using a strategy in which she assumes the family will work with her. "*She just says, 'I'm available to meet with you on these days.' She doesn't give a choice. Then when they say, 'Why do I have to meet with you? Then she says, 'Well, it's optional." But she'll start with, 'We're just going to meet,' and most of them take her up on it.*" A worker from a different agency described being very clear about the program being voluntary at the beginning of her initial contact. "*I let them know upfront, that it's not mandated. It's not anything they have to do but I also try to explain the benefits of doing it. This will help your child get back on track ... as an advocate, I can advocate for you and your child on behalf of you and the school. Most parents will generally take it, if it's an additional voice that will help them, they're generally open to it.*"

All of the workers reported that if they are able to make contact with a family, most of the time the parent will choose to engage with them. To get to that point, workers must convince the parent of the program's ability to help them and their child, and they say it is helpful to differentiate themselves from Hennepin County employees. Workers and supervisors said it is important to build trust and rapport in that initial (phone) contact. Some workers who shared similar racial, ethnic, and/or linguistic backgrounds with the families felt that those factors allowed them to build trust more quickly. Another issue that some workers cited as increasing engagement rates for families

was the involvement of Hennepin County Child Protection Services (CPS). Workers said that families are sometimes given the choice to work with a be@school worker or with a CPS worker, and in those cases they will choose the be@school worker. As one worker said, "*I think some families are really scared of CPS so they think the intervention is worth trying.*"

Despite the willingness of most families to work with be@school if contact is made, workers did acknowledge that there are families who will turn down the program. Workers reported that some parents turn down the program because they believe that the school made a mistake in the attendance record or they will acknowledge that a problem did occur but say that they have resolved the problem since the school made the report and the child is now attending school regularly. Sometimes the parents report that they have transferred their child to another school and now the problem is resolved. Other times parents turn down the program because the worker has not convinced the family that he or she could actually help them. One worker said, *"Some of the parents just feel like, 'What are you going to do? I can't get my kid to school, what are you going to do?' "* Another worker said parents have told her, *"You're really not going to do much,"* or *"What are you going to do? What are you going to do for me? There's nothing you can do for me that I haven't already tried or already done."* Workers also said that some families already have a number of caseworkers involved in their lives, either through child protective services, county mental health services, financial assistance, etc. and they are not interested in having another worker involved, either because of the difficulty in managing that many workers or because of added intrusion in their lives. One worker said, *"I've had three families or so who've outright said, 'We're not doing this. I don't want to be involved in it. It's another way of getting in my business.'"*

Finally, a few workers expressed a belief that parents are reluctant to participate in the program because of feelings of shame. One worker explained that when working with adolescents,

the law holds them accountable for getting themselves to school, but with children under the age of 12, the parents are held accountable. These parents know that when a worker comes to their house their parenting skills will be assessed and the caseworker will expect them to make changes. In these cases, "*parents feel they are the ones to blame*," and they "*don't necessarily like that and they're not going to be open to having a case open.*" This sense of shame and embarrassment can be exacerbated in tight-knit immigrant communities. A supervisor of an agency that works predominantly with the Hmong community explained, "*We've had only a handful that don't want Hmong caseworkers, part of that is because of stigma and not wanting people to talk about that in the community.*"

Assessment

Case workers and supervisors said that once the caseworker makes contact with a family and the parents agree to participate in the program, the worker sets up an initial intake meeting with the family. The focus of the first meeting is to get the appropriate paperwork filled out and signed (including the Release of Information and a Family Action Plan, see Appendix D). An initial assessment of the presenting problem is conducted to determine why the child is chronically absent and to discuss supports and services that may be appropriate in helping the child return to school consistently.

The HCAO does not provide a formal assessment tool to community agency staff. In the past, they did provide a tool but some workers felt it wasn't helpful or applicable so the tool is no longer required (see Appendix E). Two workers said that they like the tool so they continue to use it as part of their assessment process even though it is no longer required. As one worker said, "*There's a form – be@school used to have it but they no longer have it – but I find it very useful and helpful in getting a sense of what's going on in the family, if there are other barriers like language, transportation, housing, etc.*" Another worker said, in reference to the be@school intake form, "*It's not part of what we have to do anymore, but I*

still like to do it because I like to know how the parent feels about certain things or areas where that parent is struggling." In contrast, other workers were glad to not have to use the form anymore. They said the form was unnecessary because the questions "*made no sense*," or were "*off the wall*," and "*completely irrelevant*." or included "*stuff we'd already ask*." A supervisor at an agency that works predominantly with Hmong families expressed some frustration with the cultural relevance of the previous form, "*Part of it is when we have to do the translation, it just does not translate. You may have five questions asking something but in Hmong, it's all the same question.*" One agency has their own formal assessment tool that they require their workers to complete along with the required paperwork for HCAO while the other eight leave the process up to the individual worker.

One worker described beginning the assessment process (before to the first meeting with the family) by printing out the attendance data and looking for any patterns in absences. She said, "*I look to see if there's a pattern in dates like if the dates were consistent, like back to back dates, then I can establish if maybe there was an issue, like the child was sick, maybe there was a situation where they might have lost housing or they might have moved. If the child was sick, the parent might have called the first day but didn't call every day after that. Or if it's numerous days, it could've been something drastic that happened within the family. So that's the first thing I do once I get the referral.*" Another worker explained that she brings the attendance data to the first intake meeting and uses it as a starting place for the discussion with the family: *"We have the attendance information so I always start from there. So and so has missed 10 days unexcused since the start of the school year, does that sound right to you? I always start from there because sometimes it's a complete 'Nope. I sent notes in.' Sometimes it's even a logistical issue, 'I called in.' Then you're talking about something completely different than someone who's missing school and missing the bus or moving around. I always start with the attendance record."*

Workers reported that the initial intake and assessment generally take place without the child present. This is due to scheduling necessity (children are at school during the day) and the belief that

the worker will be able to have a more honest, open discussion with the parents without the child present. Workers begin their assessments with a review of who they are and the supports they can provide and then ask parents what they think the reasons are for their child not getting to school. One worker reported, "*Generally, when I'm talking to them, a lot of parents, once I start talking, they'll open up and say honestly, this is what I'm dealing with*." Workers stressed the need to identify the specific barriers and then to start looking for resources to address those barriers.

In addition to talking with parents, all workers reported that they also speak to the child as part of the assessment. Sometimes the worker meets with the child at home, but more often at school, where it is easier to be able to talk to the student alone. Workers reported that overall, children tend to be very honest in their responses, saying things like, "*I missed the bus," "I have to walk and I don't have my winter boots," "My mom forgot to wake me up,*" or "*School is too hard*." One worker said, "*It's good when you're meeting with the kid to talk to them and ask, 'Why weren't you here yesterday?' because mom will have called in sick and then the kid says mom didn't come home last night. Little kids will tell you anything.*" However, three workers noted that sometimes children have difficulty answering the question of "Why haven't you been in school?" either because they are young and are used to their current absenteeism as part of their normal pattern and therefore don't understand the question or because they are uncomfortable with the question. One worker explained, "*For some kids, they'll say, 'I just didn't come,' or 'My mom didn't let me come.' When they start that there's generally something else going on and I don't like to pry that child. I look at their body language and if they start to get uncomfortable with the question I back off and I don't ask anymore*." Another worker expressed concern that some children appear to have been coached by their parents to give answers such as, "*I was sick*," in order to avoid having to address the real issues.

Workers from one agency said they also include a conversation with school staff as part of the initial assessment process. One worker explained, "*It might be the first or second contact, but you always connect back [with the school] and say, 'Here's what we discussed the issue was,' [meaning the discussion with the parents], and they'll say, 'Oh no, that's not the issue,' or they say, 'Well we can do something about that.' It's part of solving the problems. You always get both sides of the story."* Another worker from the same agency said, *"It might be behavior issues. A lot of times the parent doesn't think there are any, but a lot of times I get connected to the behavior specialist and they say, 'Yeah, he's coming to school but then he gets off the bus and is not coming into the school.' It depends on who you talk to."*

Provision of Supports & Services

Bronfenbrenner's original Ecological Systems theory (1979) is also used in this report as a framework by which to organize the supports and services that community agency caseworkers provide to families in the be@school program. Using this framework in the section on barriers to attendance and in this section on supports and services will aid in the examination of potential connections between the factors identified by the workers and the interventions that they provide to address those factors. Figure 4 illustrates the supports and services within the ecological systems framework. Further, the process of coding the interview data highlighted three main categories of supports and services that workers provide to families: resource-based supports, relationship-based supports, and information-based supports. These categories will be further explained and illustrated throughout the following section.

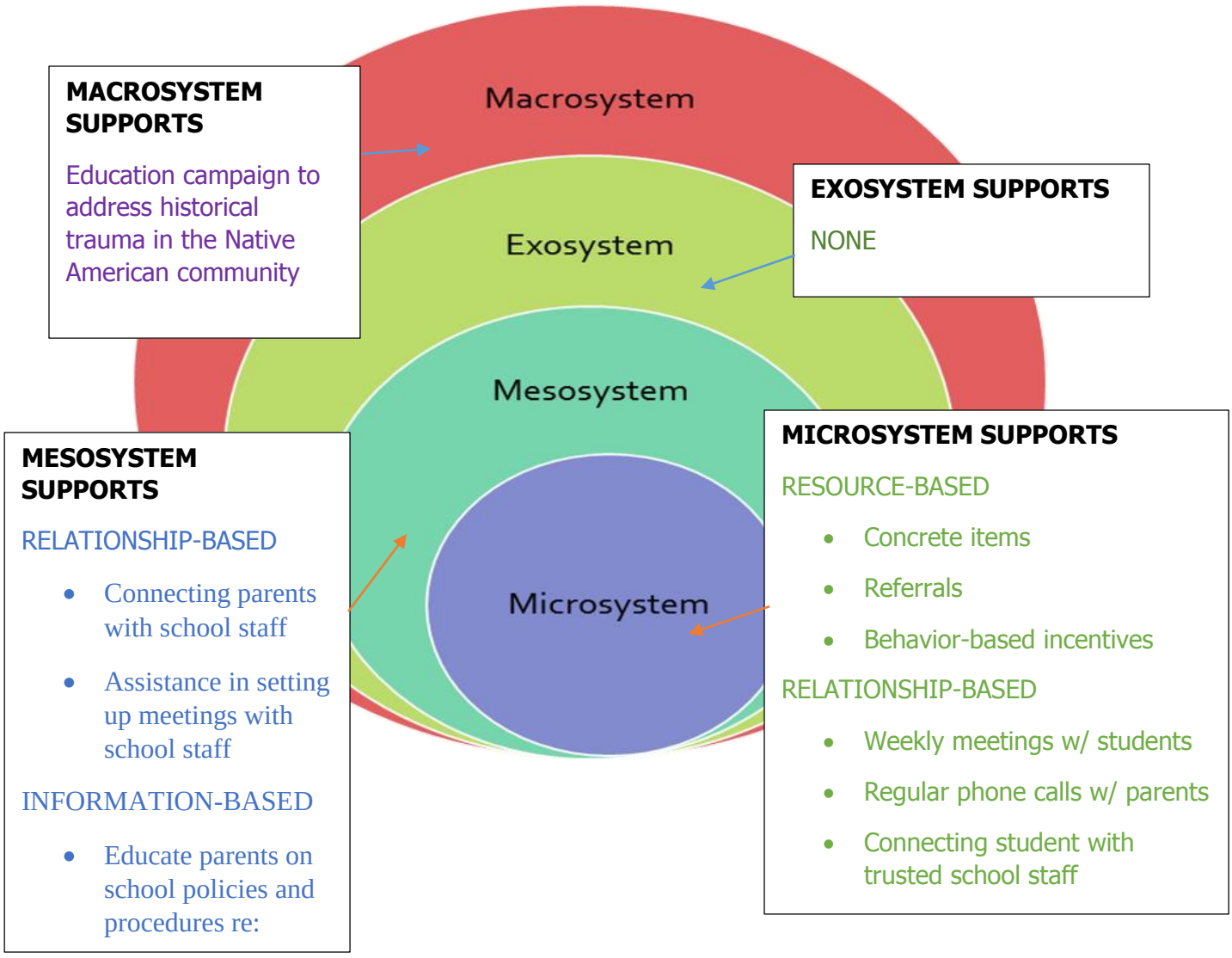

Figure 4. The ecology of supports and services provided by community case worker.

Microsystem supports & services. At the microsystem level, resource-based supports reported by caseworkers included assistance with basic needs and concrete items and referrals to other programs within and outside of their agencies. Workers and supervisors from six of the nine agencies discussed providing a variety of concrete needs to families, such as winter clothing, backpacks and school supplies, food, bus tokens, and alarm clocks. Workers discussed the provision of concrete items as a way from them to "eliminate excuses," for why the child is not going to school. As one worker explained, "*I don't want any excuses as to why they're not attending. If they're saying,*

well transportation, then here are some tokens. I want to give them something. Any barrier they can come up with I want to say, 'Ok, here. I have this.' Even alarm clocks. I'll say, ok we'll get you an alarm clock. For any barrier, I try to make sure I have something for it."

Workers reported that when they are unable to provide direct resources to a family, they frequently make referrals to other programs that may be able to help, such as housing assistance programs, immigration attorneys, or free or low-cost medical clinics. Referrals to mental health services were the most commonly cited type of referral provided. One worker said that when she notices that the child may have mental health needs, she refers the parent to children's mental health services but that often "*the parents kind of pull back when you talk about mental health and they try not to follow through ... If I saw the kid and I'm concerned about anger or some issue he has, and then make a suggestion then the parent is like, 'Ok, hold on.' They don't want to take the next step. You give them a brochure and say, 'Ok, you have to set up the appointment. I can't do that for you. I can go with you to the appointment if you want me to.' But taking the first step is hard for some of the parents.*" However, another worker seems to get around the issue of the parent taking the first step by calling with the parent to make the appointment, "*I help them set up the appointment. We call from here [the worker's office] or their home. I make the first appointment with them and then I call them afterwards to see how it went and ask if they have another appointment set up. Mostly they do.*"

Many of the community agencies offer a wide variety of programs and workers sometimes make referrals within their own agencies to out-of-school-time programs, food shelves, mental health case managers, access to pools or fitness centers, and tutoring. One agency offered special events, such as ski trips, and the supervisor explained that workers will use resources like that as incentives for kids to attend school, explaining "*If you attend school for the next 30 days, I'll let you go on the skiing trip with us next month.*"

In addition to provision of concrete resources and referrals for other services, workers also discussed providing relationship-based interventions within the family microsystem. Many workers said one of the first interventions discussed is providing assistance in setting up home routines that will facilitate getting children to school. One worker said, "*Routine is huge. As much as we can help parents with 'Ok, what's your bedtime routine? Oh, you're eating dinner at 10:30? It's hard to get the kids enough sleep …' or talking about the morning, 'What time do you wake up? Do you have an alarm? Do you want me to call you in the morning?' "* Another worked described having similar discussions but she focuses on the importance of the child understanding the need for the routine. *"I will sit down and write down their daily schedule and then I can say, 'You know, going to bed at 10:00, you'll never be able to get up at 7:00.' Once they understand, 'Oh I need to go to bed earlier in order to get up earlier,' once they understand that, then you notice slight changes in attendance."*

Workers from five of the agencies described the use of behavioral-based incentive programs, both for children and parents, to help improve attendance. Two workers discussed using gift cards as tangible rewards for students' improved attendance. One worker described setting up an incentive plan with two young students, wherein they attended school for 20 days, they received a $10 Target gift card each. Another worker said she gives gift cards to all the students who work with her with the amount they receive varying based on their level of attendance. One worker said that when she meets students at school, she promises to bring them a special lunch if they've had good attendance every day the week before. Two workers discussed working closely with the school in supporting school-wide attendance rewards, such as entrance into a bike raffle for good attendance or student acknowledgement at an attendance ceremony. A caseworker from an agency that houses fitness centers offers access to the fitness centers for students who are improving their attendance and their families. The worker said, "*I like the parents to know, 'Hey, we understand. We know what's going on.' I do my manager-on-duty shifts at the* [fitness center] *and a lot of times I open it up to have the*

parents go there when I'm there. I want them to do some specialty classes – BodyPump, yoga, etc. I know the kids want to go swimming and do the gym stuff. But I want the parents to know this is for them, too. I have a resource here that you can use. If a family is getting everyone to school, I want to reward the whole family."

A critical component of the caseworker intervention is the development of trusting relationships between the worker and the parents and the worker and the students. In addition to the initial trust building discussed in the initial engagement and assessment phases, throughout the course of the time that the caseworker is involved with the family, the caseworkers generally meet with students once a week and keep in phone contact with parents on a weekly basis. Workers at seven of the nine agencies discussed frequently visiting with students over the lunch hour at their school. This allows the workers to show the students that they are interested in them and their school life, and sometimes acts as an incentive to have the child be at school that day. One worker said, *'For me, the parents really appreciate that I go to the school and I meet with the child. A lot of kids really look forward to it. Those parents want to make sure their kids go to school because the kids are saying, 'Ms. _____ is coming today, I've got to get to school.' "* Although weekly check-ins with students usually happen at school, one worker described her strategy to build a relationship with students on her caseload and create a sense of accountability for going to school by going to their home and leading them through educational activities.

> *"One thing I've tried to do is engage with the children. Sometimes they can keep their parents accountable. I worked with a family last year and there were three siblings referred. What I did was come to their house every week and engage them in educational activities because that wasn't happening because their household was so large. Just like having a presence in their life was really helping them understand that they have to go to school. They called me 'teacher,' which is really funny because I'm not even a teacher. Just like visiting and establishing a relationship with the children because even when mom can't tell them to go to school or*

doesn't make it a big deal, they know I'm going to come on Friday and they're going to have to talk to me and stuff like that."

Workers also reported keeping contact with parents (weekly or biweekly) to provide support and increase accountability. As previously discussed in the barriers section of this report, many workers see attendance problems for young children as a problem that is often related more to the parents' issues than the children's, thus it makes sense that they would prioritize building relationships and community with the parents. One worker said, "*I think for a lot of parents, when you call and say, 'What's going on? Are you guys ok?' ... It lets them know that I'm really concerned about making sure that the child gets to school every day*." However, three workers discussed difficulties with contacting parents, due to either the parent being unavailable because they work multiple jobs or because their phone number changes due to mobility and financial difficulties. One worker described a situation in which the parent never returned her phone calls if she called after noticing the child had been absent. However, immediately after the phone call, the child's attendance improved suggesting that just knowing the caseworker is checking in motivates the parent to get the child to school.

In the school microsystem, caseworkers focus on fostering relationships between the student and school staff. One case worker said when a young student feels connected or attached to at least one adult at school, they are more likely to be excited about going to school, thus they attempt to facilitate that connection. Another worker explained that she first talks with the student about what problems he or she is having at school and then she sets up a meeting with the school social worker, the student, herself, and possibly the parent. The school social worker then listens to the student and talks about ways that they can resolve some of the difficulties they are facing. In a way, the community agency worker facilitates connecting the student with an advocate who is already in the

building and who they can go to throughout the school year, but may not have known to reach out to.

Mesosystem supports & services. At the mesosystem level, caseworkers provide relationship-based supports to help improve the relationships between families and schools as well as information-based supports to increase parents' awareness and understanding of school policies and processes. When working with parents, workers try to encourage and facilitate regular phone calls with the school and face-to-face meetings between school staff and parents. One worker said, "*There are a lot of families we've worked with in which the parents have had a negative experience at school themselves so they think, 'This wasn't good for me and now we're starting over with my kid.*" As with the students, workers try to get parents to have at least one connection at the school to whom they can turn to if they need help. Often, this person is the school social worker or whoever in the building is in charge of attendance. One worker said, "*A lot of them [parents] don't know the school social worker so the first thing I like to do is reconnect the parent and the staff members that they need to reach out to.*" Another worker said that "*the goal always when you close a case is to find them [parents] one solid contact at the school that you can pass them on to. Getting them communicating with the school is probably the number one goal.*"

Many caseworkers see themselves as advocates who can encourage better communication and also provide the emotional and logistical support for parents who may be initially overwhelmed at the prospect of communicating with school staff. Below is an excerpt from an interview with a caseworker who was discussing how she supports parents who are feeling very angry and frustrated with the school.

> "*Well first of all, I ask the parent if they'd like to sit down and talk with the teacher or meet with the principal. The school needs to be aware of how this parent and this child are feeling.*" [When asked if she accompanies parents to these meetings, the worker replied], "*Oh, absolutely. And that's part of*

being an advocate. I don't want a parent to feel uncomfortable. A lot of times parents sit in meetings and there's lingo that they use that the parents don't understand and they come out of the meeting asking, 'Ok, what did they mean?' or 'What did they say?' So me working with the schools, I kind of know some of the lingo, so going in with the parent it makes them feel at ease, makes them feel comfortable about talking. I always tell the parent, 'You always need to be telling the school exactly how you feel about your child being there. If there's something you're uncomfortable with, you need to be telling them, 'cause you're the biggest advocate for your child. You know your child better than anyone else so you should always be telling the school how you feel about a particular thing that's going on at the school.' But I always tell the parents to say it in a way that's respectful. You always want to keep that door open, that line of communication open. You don't want to disrespect. I've had parents that are trespassing, they can't even come on school grounds because of the way they've dealt with situations at the school. I'm always telling them, 'Please do anything you do, especially about your child, always do it in a manner that's respectful. It's kind of a reflection on your child. When you do this in front of your child, if you're acting a particular way, your child sees that and it makes them think if my mom comes up here and hollers at people then I can come up here and do the exact same thing.' "

[The worker was asked if she sets up the meetings or has the parent set them up.]

"I always ask the parent – it's always at the convenience of them and with the school, too. I don't ever want to take power away from the parent. I'm a temporary intervention so I need to give parents tools so they can do this on their own. They are eventually going to have to do this without me. I want them to be able to go into a meeting without me and say, 'This is how I'm feeling,' but I also give them the steps to say – I will sit with a parent and say – 'Ok, let's call the school. But I want you to call and say: I want to set up a meeting to talk to you about some concerns I have for my child.' I'll attend that meeting with you and you can let them know, 'I'm going to bring an advocate with me.' Most of the schools I work with know me and know

who I'm working with so they know if a parent calls asking for a meeting and this is a student that I have that's in truancy then I'm going to come. I'm always telling parents, 'be involved, be active. You don't have to announce you're showing up at the school. You can show up anytime you want to if your child attends there. Take 10-15 minutes if you can to come up there, talk to the teacher, meet the principal, find out what's going on. You want to know the people who are around your child. You don't want to send your child somewhere where you never come in, you never come to conferences. You want to know what's going on.' "

This excerpt illustrates how this skilled worker uses multiple strategies to assist in repairing the relationship between the parent and the school. The worker validates the parents' feelings about the school and lets them know that the parents' concerns are important for the school to hear. The worker coaches the parent on how to set up a meeting with the school, attends the meeting, provides emotional support as the parent's ally, and provides further coaching and guidance on how to communicate and be involved in the future in a way that is effective and most beneficial for their child's success at school.

While the worker in this example coaches parents on how to set up meetings, some workers said they set up school meetings for parents if they are asked to, especially if the parents' first language is not English and they feel uncomfortable attempting to set up a meeting themselves. One worker who works primarily with Spanish-speaking families said, "*The parents are very, very appreciative of us scheduling these appointments and inviting them so they know where the kid is at.*" Another worker assigned mostly to Spanish speaking families encourages her families to call the school and leave a message in Spanish and then she works with the school to have the message translated. She explained, "*A lot of my Latino families won't call [the school]. They'll say, 'I leave messages but no one gets back*

to me. I don't think they understand me so what's the point.' I let them know now that I'm working with them. I'll send an email to the school saying, 'Hey mom called and left you a message. Have someone translate it.' "

Two workers discussed setting up their own meetings with school staff, without the parents necessarily being present, if they feel they need information from school or need to advocate for the student's needs to be met. One worker said, "*I'm not afraid to go to the school and say, 'I need to talk to someone here, this is what's happening.' I've met with the principal, social workers, teachers, etc. They know I'm there with a purpose and not just to interrupt*." This confidence and assertiveness with school staff was echoed by another worker who described her experiences making sure students on her caseload are receiving the appropriate supports at school. She said, "*Once I do the assessment and understand what the needs are, for some of the cases, some of the kids will have major illnesses, like mental issues, and that won't be getting addressed at school. So I'll go to the nurse and the social worker and see how we can provide the resources the student needs inside the school. If it's a behavior issue, I'll try to get the parents and school staff members involved*." When asked if schools are receptive to her coordinating supports in this manner, she said, "*For the ones that they feel that that intervention would benefit the family, they'll say, 'Go ahead, let's arrange something. They'll be some schools who will say, 'You know we've been doing that intervention for a long time. There's no point in doing it again,' and I'll say, 'You know let's just give it one more shot. Now that we're involved, let's see what they do.' There can be great outcomes, sometimes the patterns still continue. I do find it helpful."*

In terms of information-based supports, workers often begin by providing parents information about policies and procedures related to attendance at their child's school: "*A lot of the focus of this [initial] meeting is to educate parents on the policies at school. Not just let them know, but educate them. We get a lot of new families from out of state who do not know the policies here*." Workers explain how to call an absence in and have it excused if the child is sick, how tardies are considered partial absences, and the consequences of continued school absenteeism. One worker always brings a copy of the school

calendar to intake meetings so families are aware of when school is (and is not) in session. Another worker talks with parents about the importance of early education and the need to establish a daily pattern of attendance in order to set a solid educational foundation for their child. One worker provides information to parents about special education supports that their child may be eligible for at school and then follows up with the school to make sure the parents' concerns are addressed. She said:

> *"If the kid is struggling academically, I'll ask the parent if the child is on an IEP [Individualized Education Plan] or getting special help. A lot of time the parents don't know. They don't understand this. The parents will sometimes come to the meeting as well and we'll talk about that. The school social worker will say, 'No, he's not on an IEP, but if you are interested in that, we can test him.' I follow through on that and make sure that does happen. I'll email the social worker and say, 'Can you update me on what's going on' because I'm a social worker and I know it's important to follow up on these things. The social worker will say, 'Yeah, we did test him. He does qualify for services.' Ok, that's what we want to know. Hopefully now things will get better."*

Exosystem & Macrosystem supports & services. The workers did not discuss providing any exosystem level supports or services. As previously discussed, the only exosystem level issues that were identified as being barriers involved parents' work schedules. No workers reported providing any services specifically related to parents' employment or issues parents were having in other microsystems in which their child did not participate. The focus of the supports and services appears to be on the two microsystems of family and school, and the mesosystem that exists between them.

One exception was an agency that works primarily with members of the Native American community. The supervisor from this agency spoke at length about an education campaign that her

agency, in partnership with a few other Native American-based community organizations, is launching to increase the school attendance of their students. This campaign was being undertaken outside of the be@school program, but supports the same goals as be@school. The supervisor said the campaign needed to work at the cultural level in her community, based in an understanding of historical distrust of education among Native communities, to improve school attendance and education for Native American students.

> **"***I think we have a lot of work to do getting our attendance numbers up. It's complicated. When we talk about our attendance campaign in our community we'll have some push back and say, 'If the schools were better for our kids, we'd go.' I have a lot of respect for the Indian Education Department and their response is, 'We're working on it,' and we're all working on it as a community of educators to help Minneapolis Public Schools work better with our kids, but we can't afford to have parents say, 'Well, until it gets better…' we can't do that. I look at it as my responsibility too – it's not just Hennepin County or the school's, it's the community, too. We need to push it.*"

The figure below (Figure 5) is a summary of the types of supports and services provided.

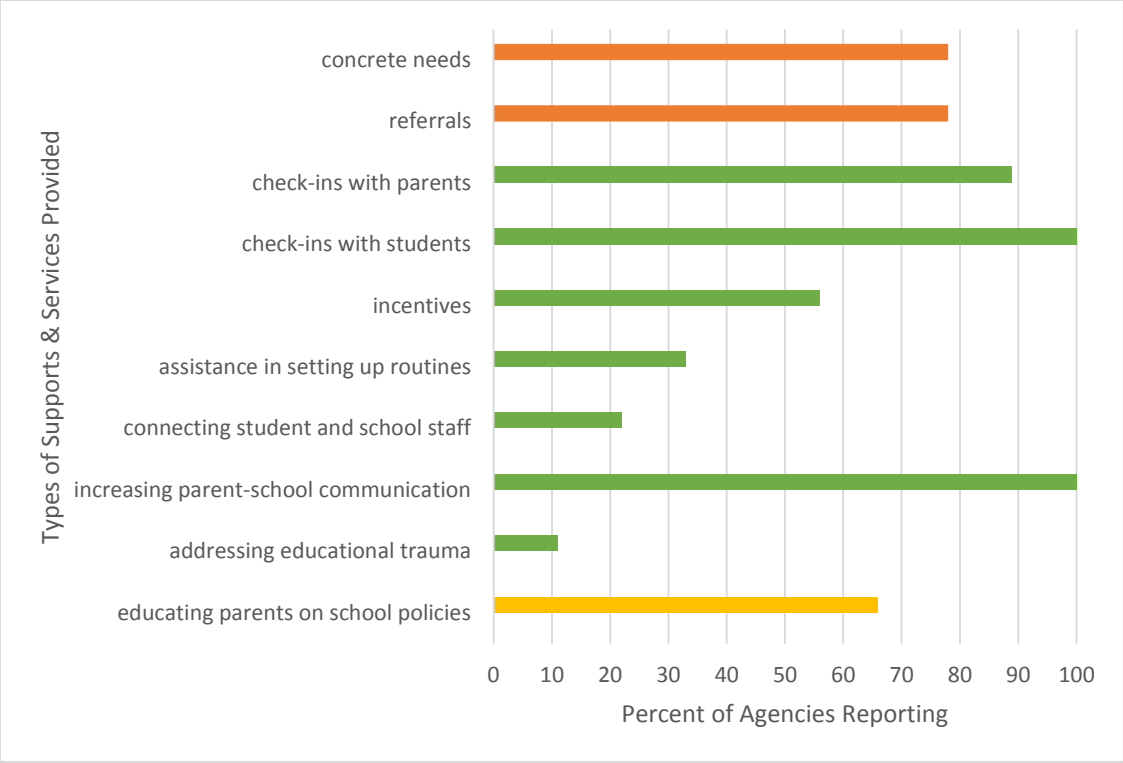

Figure 5: Types of supports and services provided by agencies to families participating in the be@school community caseworker intervention.

Question #3: How do the supports and services provided by the be@school community agency caseworkers fit with the identified factors related to school absenteeism for children in grades K–5?

As previously mentioned, published evaluations of interventions for chronic school absenteeism neglect to identify if the specific interventions provided fit with the underlying factors contributing to the absenteeism of the students in the programs (Daugherty & Sheldon, 2012; Grooters & Faidley, 2002; Lawrence et al., 2011; McClusky et al., 2004; Sheldon & Daugherty, 2013; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004; Thomas et al., 2011). An intervention can be incredibly well-designed and

executed, but if it does not address the factors contributing to the problem, it is not the appropriate intervention.

In the previous section on supports and services, three types of supports provided by caseworkers were identified: relationship-based, resource-based, and information-based. In looking at the factors identified by caseworkers as contributing to chronic absenteeism, these factors can also be placed in one of these three categories, relationship-based (e.g. poor relationship between family and school, poor relationship between student and teacher, stressful home situation leading to lack of effective routines and roles for parents and children), resource-based (e.g. housing difficulties, lack of transportation), and information-based (e.g. confusion over school policies and procedures, lack of awareness of American schooling expectations). In addition, most of the factors identified by workers fell within the microsystem and mesosystem levels, which is where all of the interventions are situated. Table 2 presents a comparison of the contributing factors to chronic absenteeism, as identified by community agency staff, and the supports and services they reported providing.

Table 2

Comparison of Factors Contributing to Chronic Absenteeism in the Elementary Grades and the Supports and Services Provided by Community Agency Caseworkers.

Ecological Level	Category	Contributing Factor	Support or Service
Microsystem	Resource-based	Housing	Referrals
		Transportation	Concrete items
		Mental health	Referrals
		Substance abuse	Referrals
	Relationship-based	Family size	Support with routines

		Family conflict	Supportive problem solving; Referral if needed; Trust-building; weekly check-ins with child and parents; incentive programs
		Child-teacher relationship	Facilitation of relationship and connection; trust-building
Mesosystem	Information-based	Lack of understanding of compulsory education laws	Providing education to parents on school policies and procedures
		Lack of understanding of importance of early education	Facilitating and increasing communication between parents and school staff
		Lack of understanding of attendance policies related to illness	
	Relationship-based	History of negative school experiences	Facilitating and increasing communication between parents and school staff
Exosystem	Resource-based	Parent employment	**NONE**
Macrosystem	Resource-based	Poverty	**NONE**
	Relationship-based	Cultural conflicts	Addressing cultural trauma regarding the education system in the Native American community

Upon visual inspection of Table 2, the services and supports provided by community caseworkers and the structure in which those supports are provided fit well with the identified factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism in the microsystems and mesosystems but not in the

exosystems and macrosystems. However, information learned through interviews with community agency staff suggests that the match between the factors and services provided are not as clean as they appear in Table 4. For example, in terms of addressing housing problems, one worker explained with exasperation, "*I have trouble referring families to anyone for housing. It's really hard to find housing. I refer them for housing and then they get back to me and say, 'No one called me back. I'm on the wait list.' What do you do?*" Similar stories were told about transportation needs. One worker said she provides bus tokens at times, but another worker said that although be@school used to provide the agencies with bus tokens, they no longer do and the agencies do not have the financial resources to provide bus tokens on a regular basis. As another worker explained, "*transportation is a major problem, but there are limited resources.*"

A poor relationship between the family and the school was identified as a key contributing factor to school absenteeism, and strengthening that relationship was reported to be a significant focus of the community caseworker intervention. However, workers reported varying levels of cooperation from school staff in executing this intervention. Although some workers reported excellent working relationships and collaboration with school staff, others said that staff at some schools refuse to share information, do not return phone calls from caseworkers, and will not let caseworkers meet with students at the school.

The biggest disconnect between the factors contributing to chronic absenteeism for young children in Hennepin County and be@school community caseworkers' supports and services is time. Be@school allows a community caseworker to work with a family for up to 90 days. However, most of the factors that the caseworkers identify as contributing to the child's chronic absenteeism, (e.g. homelessness, lack of transportation, mental health problems, poor relationships with the school, etc.) are not short-term or newly developed problems: Instead, they are long-term,

chronic issues that are not easily resolved within a three-month period. One caseworker explained, "*I feel like the kids that I've worked with who actually improve their attendance, it's because something unusual happened that caused them to be absent – an illness, or being out of town. It wasn't anything huge, just simple behavior things that can be corrected very easily. You can make those easy corrections and those kids are going to go to school. But the majority, no that's not how that works. There are all these other things. There's nothing that we're necessarily going to be able to do.*" Another caseworker echoed this frustration regarding the time limit: "*I think the timeline we have to work with the family is ridiculous. These are not quick fixes. We can't walk into a family and say 'Ok, here's what you need to do.' Bam. Done. We're gone. It's more of a long-term deal. It's not a quick fix. There are so many issues involved with the families.*"

Workers expressed concern that the time limit was not only a bad fit with the nature of the complex issues facing many families, but was also detrimental to the relationship-building aspect of their work that they feel is so crucial for success. Below are excerpts from interviews with two workers from different agencies that exemplify this concern.

> Worker 1: "*I feel like sometimes I have a relationship with the family but then I have to stop because I have to close the case and then I feel like I do more harm to the family than good. Why take a month to build a relationship and then two months later you say, 'Bye bye, I'm out of here.' As a social worker, I don't think that's good. I mean, if you want to really be there for the family and work on the kid's benefit, you need at least six to nine months or maybe a year. In three months you go in, have a relationship, have the family trust you, and then you've used them up.*"

> Worker 2: "*I worry about that [the 90 day time limit] sometimes. I worry about that a lot. For some parents it takes a long time to build a stronger attachment and when it's 90 days, it's not working days so it's really not 90 days. For some kids, they get so used to you coming and then you're done. For some parents, they get used to you checking in and then you're done. You kind of want to give them tools – and I*

do that – at the initial intake I give them a booklet with all sorts of resources, so in case they ever run into this situation again, they have some place they can call. It makes it difficult for me. A lot of parents have trust issues. A lot of my families have had case managers, child protection workers, probation officers. They've had various people so if they built a relationship with someone who wasn't coming in as a county worker or officer of the court, then you have to go away, it's a little uneasy. You told them that you're going to help and support them, but you're there and then you're gone."

Finally, the be@school community caseworker intervention does not address the macrosystem level issue of poverty that workers identified as being a significant overarching factor for the majority of families on their caseloads. The result is that the supports and services provided by caseworkers function as short-term solutions but not lead to long-term change. All workers discussed the issue of "repeat families" – families they have worked with one year who come back into the system the next year, or even again within the same school year. One worker said families keep showing up in the system because "*many Band-Aids went on one owie and the problem never really was addressed."*

Question #4: What factors are associated with family engagement in the voluntary community agency caseworker intervention?

Each year, the HCAO be@school staff release "agency report cards," that tell how many students each agency served and include each agency's engagement rate. HCAO defines engagement as a signed release of information (ROI) form from the family that serves as written consent to their participation in the program. Thus, the engagement rate is the number of signed ROIs divided by the number of families referred to the agency. In the 2013–2014 school year, total engagement rates for the nine agencies that worked with elementary-aged children ranged from 14%

to 69% for students in grades K–5 with a mean engagement rate of 33% and median rate of 29.9%. Figure 6 presents engagement rates by agency.

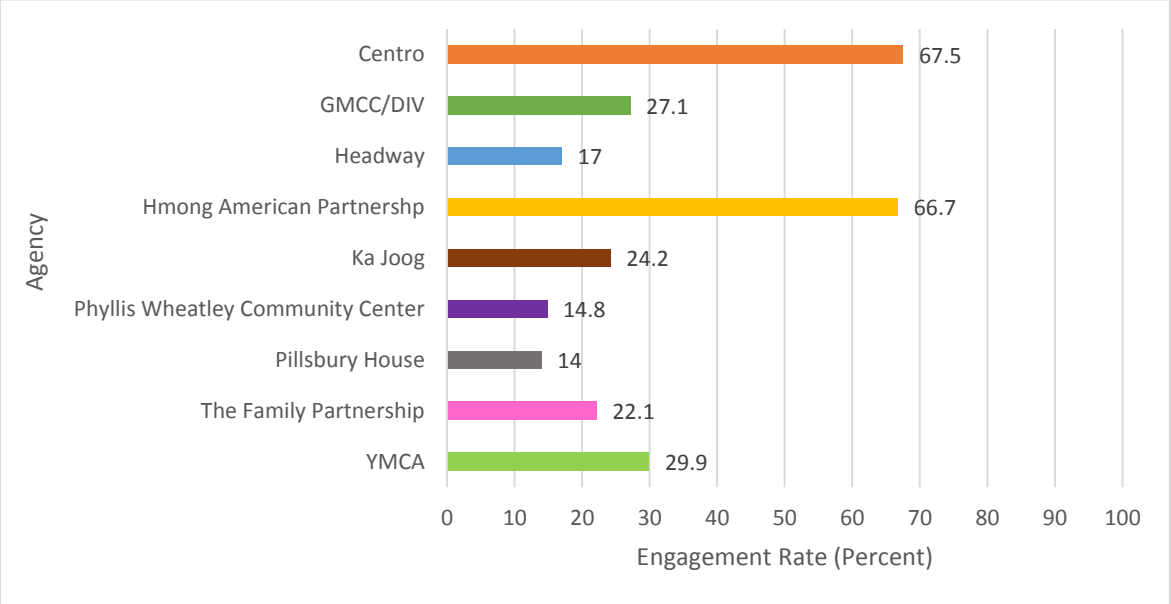

Figure 6: Engagement rates by agency, 2013–2014 school year.

As previously mentioned, be@school is a voluntary program, and the current data illustrates that the majority of families referred to the program do not participate in the case management service, despite being eligible to do so. The two main reasons that caseworkers gave for a family's lack of engagement – inability to reach families and refusal of service – could not be further explored via quantitative data because the BASIL system currently does not require agency workers to enter in a reason for closure when they are closing out a case. (There is an option to enter this information but the majority of workers do not use the field.) Thus, we were unable to confirm caseworkers' current comments about lack of engagement with the reasons they give at the time of case closure. However, we were able to examine characteristics of the students, referring schools, and assigned agencies and their relationship of those characteristics to the decision to engage or not engage in the be@school program. The findings presented below demonstrate that agency assigned

was the most consistently statistically significant factor related to engagement in the community caseworker intervention. Potential explanations for this effect are explored.

In the sample, 1,021 families (77.5%) did not engage in the community agency caseworker intervention and 297 families chose to engage (22.5%). Table 3 illustrates the demographics of these two groups. Chi-square tests were used to determine significant differences between the two groups. Significance was found for the association between race and engagement (χ^2 = 41.460, p < .001). African American students had lower rates of engagement than would be expected to occur by chance, while Hispanic, Asian, and Caucasian students had higher rates. It should be noted that the size of the relationship between race and engagement was determined to be fairly weak (Cramer's V = .177).

Table 3

Prevalence of Engagement by Gender, Race, and Grade Level

	No ROI		ROI			
Variable	***n***	**%**	***n***	**%**	χ^2	***p***
Gender					.006	.947
Male	532	77.6	154	22.4		
Female	489	77.4	143	22.6		
Race					41.460	< .001
African American*	667	82.8	139	17.2		

American Indian	154	74.4	53	25.6		
Asian**	20	62.5	12	37.5		
Caucasian**	120	69	54	31		
Hispanic**	60	60.6	39	39.4		
Grade					2.325	.803
Kindergarten	257	78.4	71	21.6		
First Grade	219	76.6	67	23.4		
Second Grade	151	74	53	26		
Third Grade	140	78.2	39	21.8		
Fourth Grade	123	79.9	31	20.1		
Fifth Grade	131	78.4	36	21.6		

*Column proportions differ significantly at p < .05. Fewer ROIs than would be expected by chance.
** Column proportions differ significantly at p < .05. More ROIs than would be expected by chance.

Differences between the two groups in terms of the district where the referrals came from (Minneapolis Public Schools or non-Minneapolis Public Schools) and the agencies where the students were assigned were also examined using chi-square analysis. Table 4 shows the results of these comparisons. Engagement frequencies for Centro, Hmong American Partnership, and

the YMCA were significantly higher than what would be expected by chance, while engagement frequencies at Phyllis Wheatley Community Center and Pillsbury United Communities were significantly lower than what would be expected by chance (χ^2 = 143.752, p < .001, Cramer's V = .330). Agencies were also divided into two types: Culturally Specific (Centro, Ka Joog, Hmong American Partnership, and GMCC/Division of Indian Work) and Non-Culturally Specific (Headway, Phyllis Wheatley, Pillsbury, The Family Partnership, and YMCA). Non-culturally specific agencies were found to have lower occurrence of engagement than would be expected by chance, and culturally specific agencies were found to have higher occurrence of engagement than what would be expected by chance (χ^2 = 72.744, p < .001, Cramer's V = .235). No significant differences by district were found.

Table 4

Prevalence of Engagement by Agency Assigned, Agency Type, and Referring District

	No ROI		ROI			
Variable	***n***	**%**	***n***	**%**	χ^2	***p***
Agency					143.752	< .001
Centro**	27	32.5	56	67.5		
GMCC/Division of Indian Work	70	72.9	26	27.1		
Headway Emotional Services	122	83	25	17		

	Hmong American Partnership**	5	33.3	10	66.7		
	Ka Joog	25	75.8	8	24.2		
	Phyllis Wheatley*	190	85.2	33	14.8		
	Pillsbury United Communities*	320	86	52	14		
	The Family Partnership	173	77.9	49	22.1		
	YMCA**	89	70.1	38	29.9		
Agency Type						72.744	< .001
	Non-Culturally Specific*	894	81.9	197	18.1		
	Culturally Specific*	127	55.9	100	44.1		
District						.718	.428
	Minneapolis Public Schools	845	77	252	23		
	Non-MPS	176	79.6	45	20.4		

*Column proportions differ significantly at p < .05. Fewer ROIs than would be expected by chance.
** Column proportions differ significantly at p < .05. More ROIs than would be expected by chance.

The chi-square results for race and engagement and agency and engagement led researchers to examine possible interaction effects between race and agency on engagement. Chi-squares were used to test for the relationship between agency and engagement within each

racial group. Results are presented in Table 5. Chi-squares were significant for Asian students (χ^2 = 15.644, p = .016, Cramer's V = .699), for whom Hmong American Partnership had a higher engagement frequency, Caucasian students (χ^2 = 33.718, p < .001, Cramer's V = .440), for whom Pillsbury and Phyllis Wheatley had lower engagement frequencies, and Hispanic students (χ^2 = 31.141, p < .001, Cramer's V = .561), for whom Centro had a higher engagement frequency, and Headway and Pillsbury had lower engagement frequencies, than would be expected by chance. The Cramer's V for Asian students (.699) and Hispanic students (.561), were very high, suggesting redundancy, possibly due to the fact that nearly half the sample of Asian students (46.9%) were referred to one agency, Hmong American Partnership, and over one-third of Hispanic students (33.3%) were referred to Centro. Relationships between agency assigned and engagement were not statistically significant for African American and American Indian students.

Table 5

Prevalence of Engagement by Agency Assigned within each Racial Group

		No ROI		ROI			
Variable		**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	χ^2	***p***
African American						13.525	.060
	Centro	4	66.7	2	33.3		
	GMCC/DIW	6	66.7	3	33.3		
	Headway	72	84.7	13	15.3		
	Ka Joog	25	75.8	8	24.2		
	Phyllis Wheatley	158	84.9	28	15.1		

	Pillsbury	242	85.8	40	14.2		
	The Family Partnership	105	82	23	18		
	YMCA**	55	71.4	22	28.6		
American Indian						8.997	.174
	Centro	3	42.9	4	57.1		
	GMCC/DIW	60	74.1	21	25.9		
	Headway	7	77.8	2	22.2		
	Phyllis Wheatley	11	78.6	3	21.4		
	Pillsbury*	28	90.3	3	9.7		
	The Family Partnership	32	68.1	15	31.9		
	YMCA	13	72.2	5	27.8		
Asian						15.644	.016
	Centro	0	0	1	100		
	Headway	5	100	0	0		
	Hmong American Partnership**	5	33.3	10	66.7		
	Phyllis Wheatley	5	100	0	0		
	Pillsbury	2	100	0	0		
	The Family Partnership	2	100	0	0		
	YMCA	1	50	1	50		
Caucasian						33.718	< .001
	Centro	12	33.3	24	66.7		
	GMCC/DIW	3	60	2	40		

	Headway	18	75	6	25		
	Phyllis Wheatley*	13	92.9	1	7.1		
	Pillsbury*	41	82	9	18		
	The Family Partnership	22	84.6	4	15.4		
	YMCA	11	57.9	8	42.1		
Hispanic						31.141	< .001
	Centro**	8	24.2	25	75.8		
	GMCC/DIW	1	100	0	0		
	Headway*	20	83.3	4	16.7		
	Phyllis Wheatley	3	75	1	25		
	Pillsbury*	7	100	0	0		
	The Family Partnership	12	63.2	7	36.8		
	YMCA	9	81.5	2	18.2		

*Column proportions differ significantly at $p < .05$. Fewer ROIs than would be expected by chance.
** Column proportions differ significantly at $p < .05$. More ROIs than would be expected by chance.

After completing chi-square analyses, logistic regressions were used to determine whether any of the variables significantly predicted whether or not a family would engage in the community caseworker intervention. Assumptions, including independence of observations and absence of multicollinearity, were checked and determined to be met. Results are presented in Tables 6 and 7. Three logistic regression models were analyzed. Model 1 regressed engagement on demographic

variables (race, gender, grade level). Model 2 added agency and district. Model 3 replaced the agency variable with agency type. The following reference groups were used: race = white, gender = male, grade = first, agency = Centro, district = Non-MPS, agency type = non-culturally specific.

In Model 1, African Americans were found to have statistically significantly lower odds of engagement than Caucasians (odds ratio = .434, $p < .001$). However, in Model 2, with the addition of agency and district, this relationship was no longer significant. In Model 2, all agencies, except for Hmong American Partnership, had statistically significantly lower odds of engagement than Centro. When the agency variable was replaced by agency type in Model 3, the statistically significantly lower odds of engagement for African American students (as compared to Caucasian students) reappeared (odds ratio = .570, $p < .001$) along with American Indian students having statistically significantly lower odds of engagement than Caucasian students (odds ratio = .613, $p < .01$). Agency type was also a statistically significant predictor of engagement, with culturally specific agencies having odds of engagement 3.303 times greater than that of the non-culturally specific agencies. Model 2 accounted for the largest amount of variation in engagement (NagelKerke's R-Square = .1418), thus it was is determined to be the superior model.

Table 6

Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Engagement

		Model 1				**Model 2**			
Predictor		*B*	*SE*	*OR*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*OR*	*p*
Race	African American	**-.768**	**.190**	**.464**	**< .001**	-.245	.220	.783	.265
	American Indian	.234	.231	.792	.312	.009	.279	1.009	.974
	Asian	.284	.404	1.329	.482	-1.00	.814	.368	.220

	Hispanic	.416	.267	1.515	.120	.161	.301	1.175	.591
Gender	Female	.016	.135	1.106	.904	-.035	.141	.966	806
Grade	Kinder-garten	-.130	.217	.878	.528	-.251	.226	.778	.584
	2nd Grade	.137	.234	1.147	.765	.124	.242	1.132	.796
	3rd Grade	-.070	.253	.932	.229	-.063	.271	.939	.050
	4th Grade	-.305	.240	.737	.434	-.532	.253	.588	.253
	5th Grade	-.188	.197	.829	.511	-.289	.207	.749	.226
Agency	GMCC/ DIW					**-1.696**	**.385**	**.183**	**< .001**
	Headway					**-2.068**	**.447**	**.126**	**< .001**
	Hmong American Partner-ship					.998	.993	2.713	.315
	Ka Joog					**-1.573**	**.504**	**.207**	**< .01**
	Phyllis Wheatley					**-2.318**	**.338**	**.098**	**< .001**
	Pillsbury					**-2.420**	**.311**	**.089**	**< .001**
	The Family Partner-ship					**-1.895**	**.311**	**.150**	**< .001**
	YMCA					**-1.408**	**.338**	**.245**	**< .001**
District	Non-MPS					.134	.309	1.143	.665

Table 7

Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Engagement, with Agency-Type Replacing the Agency Variable

		Model 3			
Predictor		*B*	*SE*	*OR*	*p*
Race	**African American**	**-.546**	**.198**	**.579**	**.006**
	American Indian	**-.490***	**.243**	**.613**	**.044**
	Asian	-.016	.421	.984	.969
	Hispanic	.318	.277	1.374	.250
Gender	Female	.016	.138	.991	.945
Grade	Kindergarten	-.162	.202	.850	.422
	2nd Grade	.158	.221	1.171	.474
	3rd Grade	.013	.238	1.013	.958
	4th Grade	**-.438**	**.261**	**.645**	**.093**
	5th Grade	-.228	.246	.796	.354
Agency Type	**Culturally Specific**	**1.195**	**.176**	**3.303**	**< .001**

The results of the previous regressions highlighted the significance of race and agency assigned when predicting engagement. Because some of the agencies were culturally specific to different racial groups, the question arose of whether or not an interaction between race and agency assigned could be present. Specifically, the question is: Does placing a family with a culturally specific agency that matches their cultural background have an additional effect on engagement (above and beyond the quality of the agency's overall engagement practices) and any racial or ethnic

disparities in engagement? To address this question, dummy variables were created for each racial group and for each of the four culturally specific agencies (Centro, Ka Joog, Hmong American Partnership, and GMCC/Division of Indian Work). The following interaction terms were then added to the regression equation presented in Model 3, HispanicxCentro, AfricanAmericanxKaJoog, AsianxHmongAmericanPartnership, and AmericanIndianxGMCC/DivisionofIndianWork. The results of this model are presented in Table 8. A positive interaction effect approaching statistical significance was found for HispanicxCentro (OR = 2.903, p = .068), suggesting that Hispanic students benefit specifically from the cultural relevance of assignment to Centro. The interaction effect for AsianxHmongAmericanPartnership was positive though not significant (OR = 4.263, p = .138), but the lack of significance may be due to the small sample size (Asian n = 32, Hmong American Partnership n = 15). For African American and American Indian students, referral to a culturally matched agency was associated with lower odds of engagement. For American Indian students, this result is not surprising: When considering race, American Indian students have low odds of engagement, and when considering the impact of agency, GMCC/Division of Indian Work has low odds of engagement. This suggests that referral to GMCC/Division of Indian Work does not provide any additional benefit to American Indian students, in terms of engagement in the be@school community caseworker intervention. The results for the interaction between African American students and referral to Ka Joog cannot be interpreted reliably as we were unable to separate out Somali students, the population for which Ka Joog is a cultural match, from other African American students in the sample, the majority of which are not Somali.

Table 8

Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Engagement, with Interaction Terms for Racial Groups by Culturally Matched Agency Assignments

		Model 4			
Predictor		***B***	***S.E.***	***OR***	***p***
Grade	Kindergarten	-.177	.205	.838	.387
	2nd Grade	.167	.223	1.182	.454
	3rd Grade	-.004	.240	.996	.987
	4th Grade	**-.491**	**.271**	**.612**	**.070**
	5th Grade	-.256	.253	.774	.310
Gender	Female	-.032	.140	.968	.819
District	MPS	-.094	.197	.910	.633
Race	**African American**	**-.406**	**.213**	**.666**	**.057**
	American Indian	.097	.282	1.102	.731
	Asian	-1.002	.791	.367	.205
	Hispanic	-.113	.364	.893	.756
Agency Type	**Culturally Specific**	**1.581**	**.287**	**4.857**	**.000**
Interactions	**Black by Ka Joog**	**-.986**	**.505**	**.373**	**.051**
	AmerIndian by DIW	**-1.413**	**.421**	**.243**	**.001**

Asian by HAP	1.450	.978	4.263	.138
Latino by Centro	**1.066**	**.584**	**2.903**	**.068**

Agency Characteristics and Engagement

A consistent finding from both the chi-square analyses and logistic regressions is the role of agency assignment in engagement rate. More specifically, greater odds of engagement for families was connected to two agencies, Centro and Hmong American Partnership. The question then arises as to whether there are characteristics specific to these agencies that could explain this effect. In the caseworker interviews, the issue of large caseloads and a high number of schools to coordinate with were cited as barriers to engagement. Table 9 shows the total caseloads (K–12) for each agency in 2013–2014. Grades K–12 were included in the caseload measure because an accurate measure of an individual caseload must include all students with whom the caseworker works. Hmong American Partnership had the smallest ratio of cases and schools to casework staff, and Centro had relatively high rates of both, suggesting that size of caseload may not explain the agency effect.

Table 9

Size of Caseload (K–12) by Agency for 2013–2014 School Year

Agency	**# of Total Referrals (K-12)**	**# of Case Workers**	**Ratio of Referrals to Case Workers**	**# of Schools (K-12)**	**School to Case Worker Ratio**	**Engagement Rate (K-5)**
Centro	252	1	252:1	41	41:1	67.5%

GMCC/ DIW	1112	1	112:1	9	9:1	27.1%
Headway	853	4	201:1	93	23:1	17%
HAP	53	1	53:1	19	19:1	66.7%
Ka Joog	67	1	67:1	36	36:1	24.2%
Phyllis Wheatley	270	1	270:1	15	15:1	14.8%
Pillsbury	421	1	421:1	18	18:1	14%
TFP	304	2	152:1	31	31:1	22.1%
YMCA	405	3	135:1	71	24:1	29.9%

To better understand the relationships between caseload size, school-load, and agency engagement rates, correlation coefficients were calculated (see Table 10), with agency as the unit of analysis (as opposed to student as the unit of analysis in the preceding analyses). Caseload size is moderately negatively correlated with engagement rate ($r = -.383$), suggesting that as caseload size increases, agency engagement rate decreases. Interestingly, the number of schools assigned to a case worker is strongly positively correlated with engagement rate ($r = .673$), suggesting that larger numbers of schools assigned to an agency is related to higher engagement rates. As this finding appears to be illogical, a more appropriate interpretation of this finding would be to suggest that the number of schools assigned to an agency is not related to engagement rate and this variable is representing some other quality of the agencies that is associated with increased engagement.

Table 10

Correlations for Agency Engagement Rate and Caseload Size and Number of Schools Referred

Measure	Engagement Rate
Caseload Size	-.383**
# of Schools	.673**

**p < .01

Based on data from earlier analyses that suggest that race may be a significant factor in engagement, the relationship between the percent of referrals from each racial category to the agency's engagement rate was examined. The correlation coefficients are presented in Table 11. Strong relationships were found to exist between percentages of each racial group, except for American Indian (whose relationship was significant but weak), and agency engagement rate. Percent of total agency referrals who are Caucasian, Asian, American Indian, and Hispanic are positively correlated with engagement rate, while the percentage African American is negatively correlated with engagement rate.

Table 11

Correlations for Engagement Rate and Proportion of Referrals from Each Racial Group

Racial / Ethnic Group	Engagement Rate
% African American	-.770**
% American Indian	.102**
% Asian	.841**

% Caucasian	.685**
% Hispanic	.747**

**p < .01

Referring Schools and Engagement

Although attendance in the Minneapolis Public Schools versus any other district was not shown to be a significant predictor of engagement in the community caseworker intervention, during the qualitative interviews, a number of workers cited difficulties with staff at specific schools impeding their ability to contact and engage families. The schools cited in the interviews were primarily in the Minneapolis Public Schools district. Thus, the research team decided to take a closer look at the relationship between individual school and engagement in the community caseworker intervention. Due to the large number of Minneapolis Public Schools represented in our sample, we ranked each school by the number of referrals and took the top half of the median split, resulting in a sample of 15 schools with referrals ranging from 29–160 students per school for a total of n = 892 students. Table 12 contains the crosstabs and accompanying chi-square statistic (χ^2 = 52.541, p < .001, Cramer's V = .243), which show a moderate relationship between referring school and engagement. Three schools, Bancroft, Folwell, and Green have more students whose families engaged in the community caseworker intervention than would be expected by chance, while Jenny Lind and Sheridan have fewer.

Table 12

Prevalence of Engagement for Referring Schools in the Minneapolis Public Schools with the Largest Number of Referrals

Variable	No ROI		ROI		χ^2	*p*
	n	%	n	%		
School					**52.541**	**< .001**
Andersen	89	77.4	26	22.6		
Anishinabe	59	72.8	22	27.2		
Bancroft**	**22**	**59.5**	**15**	**40.5**		
Bethune	52	80	13	20		
Hall	24	82.8	5	17.2		
Emerson	25	71.4	10	28.6		
Folwell**	**19**	**51.4**	**18**	**48.6**		
Green**	25	58.1	18	41.9		
Hmong Int'l	29	65.9	15	34.1		
Jefferson	56	80	14	20		
Jenny Lind*	**29**	**93.5**	**2**	**6.5**		
Lucy Craft Laney	60	78.9	16	21.1		
Nellie Stone Johnson	30	78.9	8	9.7		
Pillsbury Math/Science/Tech	27	87.1	4	12.9		
Sheridan*	**141**	**88.1**	**19**	**11.9**		

*Column proportions differ significantly at p < .05. Fewer ROIs than would be expected by chance.
** Column proportions differ significantly at p < .05. More ROIs than would be expected by chance.

A logistic regression was used to further explore this relationship, replacing the variable for district in Model 2 (see Table 6) with referring school. Assumptions, including independence of observations and absence of multicollinearity, were checked and determined to have been met. The reference for the school variable was Sheridan. Sheridan was chosen because it has the largest number of referrals (160). It was mentioned by multiple caseworkers as being a challenging school to work with and has one of the lowest engagement rates. Results are presented in Table 13. Both the school and agency variables were significant predictors of engagement, with Ka Joog, Phyllis Wheatley, Pillsbury, The Family Partnership, and the YMCA having significant lower odds of engagement than the reference group, Centro, and Bethune, Hall, Hmong International Academy, Lucy Laney, and Nellie Stone Johnson having significantly higher odds of engagement than Sheridan.

Conclusions about why students who attend Sheridan have such low odds of engagement, particularly in comparison to Bethune, Hall, Nellie Stone, and Hmong International Academy, are difficult to draw given the complexity and relational nature of engagement and the limited data to which we have access. Demographic information about each of the above school's student body was retrieved from the Minnesota Department of Education for the 2013–2014 school year. No meaningful differences were noted between Sheridan and the higher performing schools. All schools had between 82–97% of their student bodies on free/reduced lunch, with a mean of 88%, (Sheridan's level was 88.84%). All the schools were majority/minority populations, with all but Hmong International Academy having over 50% African American students. One finding of note was the percent of the student body referred to be@school. Bethune, Hall, Nellie Stone, and Hmong International referred between 5–18% of their student body to be@school in 2013–2014.

Sheridan referred 31.87%. In looking at the referral rates of the other high referring schools, only Anishinabe School came close to Sheridan with a referral rate of 30.22%.

Table 13

Summary of a Logistic Regression Analysis of Engagement, including Referring School

		Model 5			
Predictor		*B*	*SE*	*OR*	*p*
Race	African American	-.209	.307	.811	.496
	American Indian	.164	.362	1.178	.650
	Asian	-.949	1.150	.387	.409
	Hispanic	.381	.412	1.464	.355
Gender	Female	-.199	.182	.820	.274
Grade	Kindergarten	-.309	.264	.734	.243
	2nd Grade	.201	.284	1.222	.479
	3rd Grade	-.058	.308	.943	.850
	4th Grade	-.328	.342	.720	.337
	5th Grade	-.013	.324	.987	.968
Agency	GMCC/DIW	-1.682	1.238	.186	.174
	Hmong American Partnership	-.775	1.459	.461	.595
	Ka Joog	**-1.768**	**.719**	**.171**	**.014**
	Phyllis Wheatley	**-4.268**	**.796**	**.014**	**< .001**
	Pillsbury	**-2.325**	**.413**	**.098**	**< .001**

	The Family Partnership	**-1.575**	**.378**	**.207**	**< .001**
	YMCA	**-1.803**	**.688**	**.165**	**.009**
School	Andersen	.109	.400	1.115	.786
	Anishinabe	.450	1.244	1.568	.718
	Bancroft	**.975**	**.522**	**2.650**	**.062**
	Bethune	**2.822**	**.829**	**16.805**	**.001**
	Hall	**2.123**	**.919**	**8.359**	**.021**
	Emerson	-.103	.540	.902	.849
	Folwell	**.980**	**.511**	**2.663**	**.055**
	Green	**.847**	**.465**	**2.333**	**.069**
	Hmong Int'l	**2.695**	**.860**	**14.800**	**.002**
	Jefferson	.442	.417	1.556	.289
	Jenny Lind	-.825	.808	.438	.308
	Lucy Laney	**.971**	**.393**	**2.641**	**.013**
	Nellie Stone Johnson	**1.994**	**.885**	**7.348**	**.024**
	Pillsbury Math/Science	.763	.706	2.144	.280

Question #5: What is the relationship between participation in the community caseworker intervention and attendance outcomes?

This evaluation is primarily formative in its focus, rather than summative. However, given that the goal of the entire be@school program is to improve student attendance, the research team felt it was important, as the elements of the community caseworker intervention were examined, to consider the attendance outcomes as they relate to participation in the intervention. For the

purposes of this analysis, the outcome of "success" was operationalized as the absence of an additional referral to be@school for continuing absenteeism within the same calendar year. In other words, students who were not re-referred to be@school after their initial referral to a community agency caseworker were deemed to have experienced success. Table 14 shows the results of a chi-square analysis of engagement in the community caseworker intervention and success. No statistically significant differences were found between the odds of success for students who did and did not participate in the be@school community caseworker intervention. Overall, 71–76% of students referred to the community caseworker intervention are not referred to be@school for continued attendance problems, whether or not they actually engaged in the intervention.

Table 14

Prevalence of Success by Engagement Status

	Success			
	No		Yes	
Engagement	n	%	n	%
No	250	24.5	771	75.5
Yes	87	29.3	210	70.7

Two logistic regressions were conducted to confirm the relationship between the variables for which there data exists and the odds of a successful attendance outcome. The results of these regressions are presented in Table 15. Reference groups included: no ROI for engagement, Caucasian for race, male for gender, 1st grade for grade level, Centro for agency, and non-MPS for district. In Model 1, success was regressed on engagement alone, resulting in a model that did not

meet criteria for statistical significance (χ^2 = 2.794, p = .095), supporting the finding that engagement is not significantly related to success. Race, gender, grade level, agency assigned, and district were added to the regression equation in Model 2. The results of this regression demonstrate that, regardless of engagement, American Indian students have statistically significantly lower odds of success than Caucasian students, kindergarteners have statistically significantly lower odds of success than first graders, and females have statistically significantly higher odds of success than males.

Table 15

Summary of a Logistic Regression Analysis of Success, Controlling for Engagement

Variable		*B*	*SE*	*OR*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*OR*	*p*
Engagement		**-.245**	**.147**	**.783**	**.095**	**-.289**	**.151**	**.749**	**.068**
Race	African American					-.236	.213	.790	.269
	American Indian					**-.544**	**.265**	**.580**	**.040**
	Asian					-.068	.616	.934	.912
	Hispanic	.				.245	.320	1.277	.444
Gender	**Female**					**.343***	**.131**	**1.409**	**.009**
Grade	**Kinder-garten**					**-.390**	**.188**	**.677**	**.038**
	2nd Grade					-.087	.217	.687	.187
	3rd Grade					.000	.228	1.000	.999
	4th Grade					.267	.254	1.306	.294
	5th Grade					.166	.239	1.180	.489
Agency	GMCC/ DIW					-.372	.402	.689	.355

	Headway	-.425	.441	.654	.336
	HAP	1.302	1.227	3.677	.289
	Ka Joog	.691	.628	1.997	.271
	Phyllis Wheatley	-.024	.359	.977	.977
	Pillsbury	.143	.342	1.154	.675
	The Family Partner-ship	-.438	.342	.645	.200
	YMCA	-.566	.365	.568	.121
District	MPS	.187	.284	1.205	.510

Each engagement group was examined separately to attempt to determine if any factors related to the success outcomes within groups. Chi-squares were conducted within each engagement level on race and success, gender and success, grade level and success, and district and success. No statistically significant relationships were found between grade level and success for either level of engagement. For race and success, within the non-engaged group only, American Indian students had lower odds of success than would have been expected by chance (χ^2 = 12.025, p = .017). No other relationships between race and success were found. For gender, statistically significant differences were found only in the non-engaged group, in which being female was associated with a higher rate of success while being male was associated with a lower rate. For district, differences were only found in the engaged group, in which students who do not attend the Minneapolis Public Schools had less engagement than would be expected by chance while students enrolled in the Minneapolis Public Schools had higher odds of engagement.

Other than the finding regarding better success odds for students enrolled in the Minneapolis Public Schools who participate in the community caseworker intervention, the previous analyses do not provide much information on the factors associated with success for students in the engaging group. Our analyses examining factors influencing engagement determined that agency assignment is strongly related to the odds of engagement in the community caseworker intervention. The question of whether or not agency assignment was also related to success for students who actually participated in the program was then examined. Table 16 shows the results of the chi-square test on the relationship between agency assignment and success for the students who engaged (χ^2 = 15.517, p = .05, n = 297). As it did with engagement, referral to Centro was associated with a higher occurrence of success than would have been expected by chance, with 82.1% of students referred experiencing success. Table 17 presents the results of the logistic regressions, first with agency alone and then with agency and the remaining demographic variables. Reference groups included: Caucasian for race, male for gender, first grade for grade level, Centro for agency, and non-MPS for district. Although statistically significant effects were found for agency assignment in Model 1, with both Headway and the YMCA having significantly lower odds of success than Centro, those effects disappeared once the other variables were added in Model 2. Although Model 2 was statistically significant (χ^2 = 31.416, p = .036), none of the predictors in the model were significant. These findings confirm our assertion that very little conclusions about factors influencing attendance outcomes, either for participants in the community caseworker intervention or non-participants, can be made in this analysis. Future analyses should explore these questions further.

Table 16

Prevalence of Success by Agency

	Success			
	No		Yes	
Agency	n	%	n	%
Centro**	10	17.9	46	82.1
GMCC/DIW	9	34.6	17	85.4
Headway*	12	48	13	52
HAP	1	10	9	90
Ka Joog	1	12.5	7	87.5
Phyllis Wheatley	11	33.3	22	66.7
Pillsbury	11	21.2	41	78.8
The Family Partnership	17	34.7	32	65.3
YMCA	15	39.5	23	60.5

*Column proportions differ significantly at $p < .05$. Less SUCCESS than would be expected by chance.

** Column proportions differ significantly at $p < .05$. More SUCCESS than would be expected by chance.

Table 17

Summary of Logistic Regression of Success for Engaged Students

Predictor		Model 1				Model 2			
		B	*SE*	*OR*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*OR*	*p*
Agency	**GMCC/ DIW**	**-.890**	**.540**	**.411**	**.099**	-.712	.677	.490	.293
	Headway	**-1.446**	**.531**	**.236**	**.006**	-.536	.722	.585	.488
	HAP	.671	1.110	1.957	.546	1.705	1.894	5.499	.358
	Ka Joog	.420	1.125	1.522	.709	1.269	1.256	3.556	.312
	Phyllis Wheatley	-.833	.508	.435	.101	-.432	.620	.649	.486
	Pillsbury	-.210	.487	.810	.666	.266	.585	1.304	.650
	The Family Partner-ship	**-.894**	**.460**	**.409**	**.052**	-.656	.547	.519	.230
	YMCA	**-1.099**	**.482**	**.333**	**.023**	-.552	.569	.576	.332
Race	African American					-.347	.430	.707	.420
	American Indian					-.153	.526	.858	.771
	Asian					-1.107	1.521	.331	.467
	Hispanic	.				.380	.556	1.462	.495
Gender	Female					.368	.279	1.445	.188
Grade	**Kinder-garten**					**-.683**	**.398**	**.505**	**.086**
	2nd Grade					-.500	.426	.607	.420
	3rd Grade					-.406	.479	.666	.396

	4th Grade	.950	.705	2.586	.178
	5th Grade	-.564	.485	.569	.245
District	Non-MPS	.880	.509	2.412	.109

DISCUSSION

Contributing Factors & Corresponding Supports and Services

The findings from this study connect to and expand on the existing literature on chronic absenteeism, as well as offer information critical for the continued improvement of chronic absenteeism intervention for elementary-aged children in Hennepin County. Information on the multitude of factors impacting chronic absenteeism in young children provided in the interviews with caseworkers echo the theme of complexity found in the literature (Blazer, 2011; Carroll, 2013; Chang & Romero, 2008; Reid, 2008; Reid, 2012; Thornton et al., 2013; Romero & Lee, 2008; Zhang, 2003). For example, caseworkers named lack of stable housing and high family mobility as the primary factors in young children's chronic school absenteeism which is consistent with published articles that report a high correlation between family mobility and absenteeism (Blazer, 2011; Change & Romero, 2008). Mental health problems, frequently mentioned by caseworkers, are cited throughout the literature on school absenteeism in young children as having a significant impact on attendance (Blazer, 2011; Carroll, 2013; Chang & Romero, 2008; Reid, 2008). Every single worker and supervisor cited an economic need issue as a primary factor contributing to children's school absenteeism, and this assessment is supported by the published literature, which consistently reports strong relationships between family poverty and chronic absenteeism (Thornton et al., 2013; Reid, 2012; Chang & Romero, 2008; Romero & Lee, 2008; Zhang, 2003), suggesting a larger socio-economic issue rather than a problem specific to an individual family. Overall, the ecological context of children experiencing chronic school absenteeism problems was described by community agency workers as being low on resources (money, time, flexible employment, social support), low on routines and structures, and high on stressors (family conflict, substance abuse, mental health, negative or disconnected relationships with school staff).

One issue that has received significant attention in the literature on chronic absenteeism in young children is "school refusal behavior," which Kearney (2003) defines as "child-motivated refusal to attend school or difficulty remaining in classes for an entire day" (p. 59). School refusal behavior in younger children is often symptomatic of larger psychological issues such as separation anxiety and generalized anxiety disorders, oppositional defiant disorders, depression, and school phobia (Kearney & Bates, 2005). It is interesting to note that school refusal behavior involving school anxiety or phobia was *not* identified by community agency workers as a prominent factor related to the absenteeism of the students with whom they work in the be@school program. One reason for this may be that when encountering young students demonstrating predominantly anxiety-based school refusal, schools may attempt to address this issue using their own mental health staff (e.g. school social workers and school psychologists) rather than reporting the absences to Hennepin County. Further investigation involving discussions with school-based staff could shed more light on the absence of predominantly school-refusal behavior referrals to be@school.

The multi-faceted nature of chronic absenteeism lends itself to the application of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979; 2005) as a useful analytical framework for understanding the problem and possibly guiding the development of interventions to address it. However, the nature of the complexity of chronic absenteeism poses significant challenges for policy makers and practitioners who are often operate with limited resources to design and implement interventions that address all significant aspects of the problem. Many of the issues that are relevant within the family and school microsystems relate to larger issues within the macrosystem, which refers to the cultural, political, and economic environment in which the child lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Despite workers acknowledging that larger issues such as poverty were underlying most of the reasons that their students weren't successfully attending school, overall there were very limited macrosystem-level supports or services provided. Reasons for this may be

that working in larger political, economic, and advocacy realms is beyond the scope of practice for many workers and beyond the scope of their job descriptions. The workers have large caseloads filled with families who have immediate microsystem-level needs. More broadly, be@school as a model is not structured to provide a way for agencies to work on the larger political and cultural issues that may underlie the issue of chronic absenteeism, resulting in these broader-level strategies being left out of the practice of most workers.

In addition to a lack of response to macrosystem level issues, the ability of community agency caseworkers to respond to issues in the microsystem and mesosystem can also be constrained by other factors. For example, workers reported that staff at some schools can be difficult to work with and can impede their ability to address the family's needs. Lack of a positive partnership between school and community agency staff can challenge the core goals of the workers' interventions. Workers reported that establishing a positive relationship between the family and school staff is a key goal of their work. However, it is difficult to try to facilitate a positive relationship between a family and school staff if a parallel positive relationship does not exist between the agency worker and school staff. Workers who are successful at working with most school staff discussed the importance of making sure the school staff understand the role of the agency worker and how they are there to support the work the school is doing. Many workers, when describing a positive relationship with school staff, stressed that "they know me." The importance of schools knowing the details of the be@school program and having a personal relationship with the community caseworker is seen as critical from a caseworker's point of view in allowing for successful partnering with the school. This sense of knowing can be challenging to maintain when staff change buildings or new staff are hired, a common issue in the schools.

The community caseworker intervention can also be difficult to implement with fidelity due to the high number of cases that flood the agencies in the late winter and early spring. As previously discussed, the high number of cases agencies receive (20–40 a week) during certain months of the year decreases the caseworker's ability to put in the time and work necessary to effectively engage families. Additionally, as one supervisor explained, even if a worker is able to engage a family, with such high caseloads, "*our staff are so busy that they can't provide the levels of service that all our families deserve or that we want to provide. That's frustrating for us, and I'm sure it's frustrating for our families, too.*"

Understanding Engagement

Although caseworkers cited inability to contact families as the primary reason for non-engagement, followed by families refusing services, the BASIL system does not require caseworkers to provide a reason for case closure when they are closing a case and thus we were unable to retrieve quantitative data to corroborate the reasons provided by the caseworkers. It would have been useful to be able to see how many cases were closed due to lack of contact and how many were closed because the parents turned down the service (including the reasons given for refusing the service). Having this information would assist in determining where and how to make improvements in the engagement process. This issue will be discussed further in the recommendations section at the end of this report.

Despite the lack of clarity on the reasons that families don't engage, the results of this study do highlight the significance of the agency assignment in engagement. Certain agencies, specifically Centro and Hmong American Partnership, consistently demonstrate higher engagement rates and better odds of engagement than the other agencies. This finding suggests that be@school staff may want to look more closely at the strategies and processes employed by these two agencies to determine if they could be applied at the other agencies to increase engagement. Our results also

show that the likelihood of engagement differed significantly depending on the school from which the child was referred and that referral rates varied widely by schools. Be@school staff may want to connect with schools with particularly high referral and low engagement rates (e.g. Sheridan and Jenny Lind in the Minneapolis Public Schools) to gain a better understanding of these issues and develop stronger partnerships to improve student attendance.

Engagement & Attendance Outcomes

It is difficult to interpret the lack of a relationship between engagement in the community caseworker intervention and attendance outcomes due to the complex nature of school absenteeism and the limited data to which we have access for this analysis. As seen in the literature review and the qualitative interview data, many factors contribute to school absenteeism and to improvement in attendance, and our current study was not structured to collect data to examine all of these factors. We were able to examine basic demographic information about the two groups (engaged and non-engaged students) to see if any differences existed. No significant differences for gender, district enrolled, or the distribution of students across the grade levels existed between the two groups. In terms of race, the non-engaged group had a statistically significantly higher proportion of African Americans (65.3% vs. 46.8% for the engaged group) and statistically significantly lower proportions of Asians (2.0% vs. 4.0%), Caucasians (11.8% vs. 18.2%), and Hispanics (5.9% vs. 13.1%). These racial differences do not shed any meaningful light as to why students in the non-engagement group have equivalent attendance outcomes to those in the engaged groups.

One conclusion we could suggest from the data on engagement and success is that perhaps just the fact that a family receives a letter from the HCAO informing them of the continued truancy issues plus a phone call or home visit from a community agency caseworker is sufficient enough intervention to spark behavior change on the part of the family. However, since we do not have a

comparison group (for whom there was no contact from the HCAO or a community agency staff), our conclusion must be considered very tentative.

Limitations of Current Study

This study had several limitations. In terms of the qualitative portion of the study, any conclusions we draw are limited by the fact that only community caseworkers were interviewed. Although the community caseworkers have a wealth of knowledge about the barriers impacting school attendance, the specifics of the interventions they provide, and the current challenges and weaknesses in the be@school model, they represent only one portion of the be@school program, hence we lack a complete picture of the intervention model. Future work could include an evaluation focusing on the perspectives of the other key actors in be@school, such as students, parents, and school staff.

In addition to the community caseworkers representing only one group of be@school actors, another limitation of interviewing this group is the fact that they are contracted by Hennepin County: They might have experienced some concern about how their participation in – and responses to – the interview questions could potentially affect their employment status. Workers were assured by the researcher conducting the interviews that their participation was voluntary. However, in actuality, workers might have felt that although they could technically opt out of participation, that choice would reflect poorly on them to their supervisors and to the HCAO.

The third limitation of this study was the lack of availability of data on key elements that would be important to consider when attempting to assess engagement and success of the be@school program. Research shows that poverty is related to chronic absenteeism (Zhang, 2003), yet we did not have access to any measure of household income. BASIL does contain a field for schools to enter in whether or not a student is homeless or highly mobile, however it was completed

for a very small number of students, and thus we chose to exclude this field due to lack of reliability. As previously mentioned, we did not have access to the reasons why cases were closed and thus could not confirm if cases generally close because of lack of contact (as the caseworkers expressed in interviews) or because of families refusing service. In addition, our data set did not include any information on whether or not the students were in special education, had a history of child protection involvement, or had documented health or mental health needs, all of which can play a role in chronic absenteeism (Bell, 1994; Blazer, 2011; Carroll, 2013; Chang & Romero, 2008; Reid, 2008; Romero & Lee, 2007; Thornton, Darmody, & McCoy, 2013). Finally, although caseworkers identified the different strategies they use when working with families, they do not enter this information into BASIL. Thus, we were unable to match cases to strategies used and draw any conclusions about the effectiveness of specific strategies. These data issues will be addressed in the recommendation section.

A final limitation of the study was our use of re-referral to the be@school program during the same school year as a measure of the success of the community caseworker intervention. Although schools are mandated to report students with chronic attendance problems, they do not always comply with this policy, so it could be possible that students continue to have attendance issues after participating in the community caseworker intervention without this being reported to the HCAO. Once a child's case is closed in be@school, the HCAO does not have access to attendance data unless the child is re-referred by the school. Thus, the ability to have a more accurate measure of program success is limited.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section presents recommendations for how to improve the three main components of the community caseworker intervention – engagement, assessment, and supports and services provided – as well as specific recommendations regarding some technological improvements that could be made at Hennepin County to improve the program and future evaluations.

ENGAGEMENT

1. ***Improve access to correct contact information prior to referring a family to the community caseworkers.*** A substantial hurdle impacting engagement of families is the difficulties that community caseworkers have in locating and contacting families. Many families referred to be@school are highly mobile and thus making contact with them is often challenging. HCAO staff could make some changes to increase the likelihood of successful contact. Possibilities include:
    - ***a.*** When the referral comes in from the school, before to sending a letter to families and making the referral to the community agency, HCAO staff could check the contact information provided by the school with financial assistance records available through the County system. If a family receives financial assistance, it is likely that their contact information in that database is accurate (or at least more likely than the information accessible to the school). By checking the contact information before sending out the referral, HCAO staff may be able to decrease the number of referrals received with poor contact information.

b. Increase reimbursement to community agencies for the time they spend attempting to locate families and also provide them with an extended timeline (e.g. 21 rather than 15 days) to make contact with a family, to allow for a more thorough search.

2. ***Continue to contract with Centro and Hmong American Partnership and prioritize referring Hispanic and Asian families, respectively, to these agencies.*** Our analysis found that Latino students referred to Centro and Asian students referred to Hmong American Partnership had a higher odds of engagement when referred to these agencies due to the cultural match between these agencies and the families. It is also important to note that Caucasian students were also found to have a higher odds of engagement when referred to Centro, which suggests that in addition to providing greater engagement services to Hispanics related to the cultural match between the families and the agency, this agency may also being doing skilled engagement work that falls outside of the cultural matching effect. Thus, the HCAO should consider having Centro expand their referral capacity.
3. ***Further investigate and tap into the skills of the agencies that have very high engagement rates.*** Both Centro and Hmong American Partnership had relatively high engagement rates, upwards of 60%. Centro was shown to have higher than expected odds of engagement for both Hispanic and Caucasian students. In this analysis, only one interview was conducted at each agency. However, it might be beneficial for HCAO to conduct additional interviews and observations with staff at high engaging agencies to attempt to uncover specific factors that are contributing to their success. In addition, HCAO may want to consider using the high engaging staff as resources when training other agencies. If the high engaging agencies are engaging in strategies that are especially effective, HCAO should find a way to disseminate this information to all of the community caseworkers.

4. ***Build relationships among school staff, HCAO staff, and community agency staff***. Our analysis uncovered a wide variety of referral rates and associated engagement rates among individual schools. These differences were found not to be related to the percent poverty or racial make-up of the student body. HCAO staff should identify schools that have either high referral rates, low engagement rates, or both and set up meetings involving community agency staff and school staff to start building relationships and increase understanding of the referral process and be@school program specifics, as well increase understanding of the needs and challenges in those buildings.
5. ***Explore African American and American Indian engagement***. African American and American Indian students are over-represented in the population of students referred to the be@school community caseworker intervention and they are under-represented among those engaging in the program. The HCAO's contracts with culturally specific agencies to meet the needs of Hispanic and Asian families appears to be increasing their odds of engagement but the contract with GMCC/Division of Indian Work is not associated with higher engagement for American Indian families. The HCAO contracts with Ka Joog to address the cultural needs of Somali students but no agency is currently contracted to specifically address the needs of non-Somali African American students. Currently, three of the 15 caseworkers who work with children in grades K–5 are non-Somali African American, and they are spread among three different community agencies. The HCAO should further explore the issue of low engagement among African American and American Indian families to determine what additional factors may be associated with these low engagement rates and to identify potential strategies and tools that could be used to increase engagement.

ASSESSMENT

6. ***Further explore possible use of an assessment or screening tool***. Currently a consistent assessment process does not exist across community agencies. Considering the complex ecology of chronic school absenteeism, an assessment tool could be useful to identify families at the highest level of risk and direct proportionately higher resources to these families. Louisiana's TASC Risk Assessments are included in Appendix F as an example of a type of assessment or screening tool that could be useful.

SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

7. ***Develop partnerships with housing and transportation resources***. According to community caseworkers, housing and transportation needs are the most significant factors impacting children's ability to get to school, yet they say they have very little resources to provide families to address these needs. The HCAO and community agencies should work together to determine options to increase access to housing and transportation resources, including developing partnerships with housing and transportation agencies and increasing funding for bus passes.
8. ***Continue to build relationships among community agencies, HCAO, and schools***. This research suggests that the relationship between schools and agency staff can impact caseworkers' ability to engage families. In addition, a goal of the community caseworker intervention is to rebuild and repair the relationship between families and schools to increase the chances that students will attend school regularly. If the relationship between the community agency workers and the school is not strong, it is difficult to implement the intervention effectively. In addition, workers and supervisors have noted that hostility between HCAO and school personnel can limit their ability to be seen has a resource and partner of the schools. Thus, relationship

building with key school staff members should be a priority. In the early fall, referrals to be@school are low. This would be an ideal time for community caseworker staff and HCAO staff to set up meetings with key staff members (e.g. social workers, attendance clerks, principals) to introduce themselves, review the be@school process, and answer any questions.

9. ***Increase the intervention time limit***. Three months is a very short amount of time for a community caseworker to address the complex needs presented by many of the families referred to be@school. Some other programs similar to be@school have much longer timelines, often lasting the duration of the school year (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004; Thomas et al., 2011).
10. ***Empower parents to be active in their child's educational experience.*** Literature suggests that parent involvement in their child's educational experiences can have positive outcomes for children academically and in terms of school attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; Maynard, 2010; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Some of the community caseworkers said empowering parents to feel like they belong at their child's school, reminding them that they can ask questions, and encouraging them to advocate for their child's needs are key strategies that they use to help parents realize the importance of being engaged in their child's education. This strategy should be stressed as a central tool for all community caseworkers when working with parents of elementary-aged children, to increase the chances that parents will be able to support their child's attendance even after the caseworker intervention has ended.

<u>INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IMPORVEMENT NEEDS IN HCAO</u>

11. ***Make reason for case closure a required field in BASIL***. When caseworkers close a case, they should be given a drop-down menu of choices that can later be coded for data analysis. Options might include: unable to make contact, refused services, reached time limit, goals met.

12. ***Require caseworkers to enter into BASIL the specific strategies and activities they are engaging in***. Before closing a case, caseworkers could enter in the specific strategies or activities they have used in the case via a drop-down menu, with the option of adding in other categories as needed, to enhance the ability to link strategies with case outcomes in future program evaluations. Options could include: scheduled school meeting, referred to mental health provider, met weekly with student, etc.
13. ***Provide training to caseworkers on the importance of entering attendance barriers into BASIL.*** Explain to workers the importance of entering all barriers that they have assessed into the BASIL file on each family, to facilitate better evaluation and analysis of what factors families are facing and what strategies and supports should be provided.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Supervisors

All questions refer specifically to families with children in grades K–5.

1) Walk me through your agency's process for working with a family after receiving a referral from County be@school staff (include how you assign the case, the process the worker must go through to attempt to engage the family, what interventions your workers use in providing support for the family, etc.)

2) Do you have certain workers who are more effective at engaging families (as measured by the receipt of signed consent form)? If so, what do you think makes these workers more effective?

3) What barriers do you see impeding workers' ability to engage with families (school-based barriers, agency-based barriers, county-requirement barriers, funding barriers, etc.)?

4) What do you think would help increase the rate of engagement of families with young children at your agency?

5) 12) What are the strengths of the current be@school model of intervention?

6) 13) What do you see as the gaps or weaknesses in this current model?

Focus Group Questions for Case Managers

All questions refer specifically to families with children in grades K–5.

1) Walk me through your process from the moment you get the referral to the moment you close the case. Describe the specific tasks or strategies you use to initially engage the family (as measured by a signed release of information) and include information about the common interventions and services you provide to families.

2) What do you see as the main reasons for why kids (in grades K–5) in the families with whom you work are missing school?

3) HOW do you assess WHY the kids on your caseload are missing school? Do you know if your assessment often differs from what the parents or kids say? What do parents say? What do kids say? (Do you ask the parents and kids why they are missing school?)

4) What do you think are the factors that influence whether or not a family engages with you? Have you noticed any patterns re: which families engage with you (racial differences, economic level, geographic or school differences, age of children)?

5) What services or supports do you think are most and least helpful in improving kids' (K–5) attendance?

6) What are barriers that you see that impede your ability to engage with families (school-based barriers, agency-based barriers, county-requirement barriers, funding barriers, etc.)?

7) What do you think would help increase the rate of engagement of families with young children at your agency?

8) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current be@school model of intervention?

Appendix B

Preliminary Codes

1) Caseworker practice elements
    a. Types of services/supports provided
        i. Increasing parent engagement with the school (Maynard, 2010)
        ii. Increasing family & school communication (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004)
        iii. Behavioral interventions/contingency contracts (Maynard, 2010)
        iv. Check & Connect
        v. Case management (TASC, – Thomas et al., 2011; Early Truancy Initiative – McCluskey et al., 2004)
    b. Beliefs about efficacy of services/supports
    c. Assessment
        i. How assessment is conducted
        ii. Beliefs about assessment process

2) Program structural elements
    a. Strengths of be@school model
    b. Weaknesses of be@school model

3) Barriers to school attendance
    a. Poverty (lit review)
    b. Lack of parental understanding of attendance policies (lit review)
    c. Family mobility (lit review)
    d. Mental illness (lit review)
    e. Language cultural barriers (lit review)
    f. Bullying (lit review)
    g. Difficulty managing childhood illnesses (lit review)
    h. Academic problems (lit review)
    i. Lack of communication/ineffective engagement between schools and families (lit review)
4) Engagement
    a. How do workers engage families?
    b. Why do families engage?
    c. What do workers report as reasons for families not engaging?
        i. Barriers to contacting families
        ii. Reasons for families refusing services

5) Relationship factors
    a. Worker relationships with school personnel
    b. Parent relationships with school personnel
    c. Child relationships with school personnel
    d. Worker relationship with parents
    e. Child relationship with parents

f. Worker relationship with child

Appendix C

Final Codes

1) **Barriers to attendance**

   a. Lack of parental understanding
      i. Busing policies & procedures
      ii. Compulsory attendance
      iii. Illness policy
      iv. Importance of early education
      v. School transfer procedures
      vi. Tardiness

   b. Language or cultural barriers
      i. Cultural confusion regarding mental health
      ii. Different conceptions of time and lateness
      iii. Language barrier to calling child in sick
      iv. Native American historical distrust of schools
      v. Unfamiliarity with American school system policies

   c. Microsystem Level
      i. Child doesn't feel connected to school
      ii. Difficulty managing childhood illness
      iii. Education and attendance not a priority for parents
      iv. Family conflict
      v. Homelessness & high mobility
      vi. Lack of phone to call in sick
      vii. Lack of routine or structure in the home
      viii. Large number of children in the family
      ix. Mental illness
      x. Parental health problems
      xi. Parental substance abuse
      xii. Transportation
         1. Bullying
         2. Bus comes too late or too early
         3. Conflict with bus drivers
         4. Lack of transportation options
         5. Missing the bus – due to a child or family issue
         6. Parents don't set up busing after a move

2) **Caseworker practice elements**

   a. Assessment
      i. Beliefs about assessment process

1. Dislike old be@school assessment
2. Like old be@school assessment

ii. How assessment is conducted

b. Beliefs about efficacy of services

i. What doesn't work and why

1. Change is only short-term
2. County doesn't offer any real help
3. Difficult to provide help with housing
4. Lack of parental follow-through
5. Lack of teeth to intervention limits effectiveness
6. Many supports don't address the core issues
7. Time limit blocks effectiveness of interventions
8. Weekly check-ins with kids

ii. What works and why

1. Behavior reinforcement plans
2. Caseworkers need to be connected to resources and people in community
3. Concrete resources
4. CPS involvement
5. Educating parents on the importance of early education & school policies
6. Establishing home routines
7. Families know the case workers are monitoring attendance
8. Flexibility of adjusting interventions to meet specific family needs
9. Providing support to the parents
10. Re-establishing relationship between family and school staff
11. Service is effective if family's issues are minor, acute, and unusual
12. Stabilizing housing situation
13. Strong relationship between caseworker and family
14. Weekly check-ins with student

c. Engagement

i. How do workers engage families

ii. Why do families engage

1. Cultural, racial, gender similarity between worker and family
2. Families believe the workers can help them
3. Families see worker as separate from school & county
4. Family is already engaged with the school
5. Fear of CPS
6. Worker is calm & good listener
7. Worker is salesperson for program

iii. Why don't families engage

1. Barriers to contact

a. Dangerous neighborhoods
b. Families don't return calls or don't show up for meetings
c. Family has no phone
d. Family lives in an apartment building – can't access the door
e. High mobility of families
f. High volume of caseloads and time limit prohibits exhaustive contact efforts
g. Incorrect contact information
h. School won't release contact information

2. Reasons for refusing services
   a. Cultural misunderstanding
   b. Have too many other social workers in their lives
   c. Parent associates the worker with the school or County
   d. Parents don't think the worker can help
   e. Parents feel judged and embarrassed
   f. Program is voluntary
   g. School made a mistake
   h. Stay out of my business

d. Services & Supports
   i. Assist in establishing a home routine
   ii. Assist with enrollment in new school
   iii. Assistance with basic needs and concrete items
   iv. Behavioral-based interventions
   v. Parent education re: school policies and processes
   vi. Parent phone call check-ins
   vii. Referrals
      1. Referrals to other programs within same agency
      2. Referrals to programs in other agencies
   viii. Repairing and rebuilding relationship between family and school
      1. Connecting student with school personnel
      2. Increasing family and school communication and partnership
   ix. Weekly face-to-face check-ins with students

3) **Program Structural Elements**

a. Strengths of be@school model
   i. BASIL
   ii. Cultural responsiveness
   iii. Flexibility to meet needs of individual families
   iv. Good relationships among the community agencies
   v. HC staff are helpful
   vi. No cost to families
   vii. Option to work with families over the summer or get extensions

   viii. Provides support and resources to families
   ix. Quick turn around from referral to assignment to agency

b. Weaknesses of be@school model
   i. Caseload sizes
   ii. Communication among county, schools, or agencies
   iii. Cultural and language issues
   iv. Individual agency decisions re: staffing
   v. No teeth to intervention
   vi. Reimbursement structure
   vii. School-based referral problems
   viii. Time-limit
   ix. Unrealistic expectations

4) **Relationship Factors**
   a. Child & parents
   b. Child & school
   c. Community agencies & County
   d. Hennepin County & MPS relationship
   e. Parent & school
   f. Worker & child
   g. Worker & parent
   h. Worker & school

5) **Repeat Families**
6) **Tardy Issues**

Appendix D

be@school Hennepin County Attorney's Office

PRIVATE EDUCATIONAL DATA CONSENT TO RELEASE/REQUEST

STUDENT'S FULL NAME_____

STUDENT ID NUMBER: _____

BIRTHDATE: _____ GRADE_____

Parent Name(s):

Home Phone:
Work Phone:
Cell Phone:
Address: (Street/City/Zip Code)

I authorize the following school district:

□ Minneapolis Public Schools (District #1)

□ Other School District _____

□ to release written and verbal information to:
□ to obtain written and verbal information from:

□ HCAO be@school program

□ Contracted Community Agency (specify): _____

□ Hennepin County be@school at your library

□ Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ)

□ Little Earth -

□ Other (specify):_____
School records may be examined by parent(s), students if 18 years of age or older.

The information to be released:

_____ Official School Records (name, address, birthdate, sex, attendance record, grade level, grades, class rank, school credits, standardized group test results, discipline records)

_____ Other (specify):_____

The records will be used to:

□ Improve student attendance

□ Coordinate services

□ Other: (specify) _____

1. I/We understand this consent takes effect the day it is signed. It expires no more than one year from the date of signature.

2. This consent can be changed at any time by sending a written notice of the change to the releasing school.

3. School officials may disclose this information if authorized by law to do so.

_____ _____

Parent Signature (or student if 18 years of age of older) Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

• be@school will not re-release information to any outside party without legal authority
• A photocopy of this completed form is valid as original

be@school

FAMILY ACTION PLAN

Student's Name: _____Date of Intake:_____

Parent's/

Guardian's Name:

_____

Agency Assigned _____Case Worker: _____ Phone_____

Barriers Related to Attendance:

Action steps to be taken by student, parent & provider in order to address barriers:

Student:

Parent:

Provider:

Referrals:

Signatures:

Student:_____Date:_____

Parent/Guardian:_____Date:_____

Provider:_____Date:_____

Appendix E

Family Barrier Assessment Form

Family Needs

Child Name: _____ **Dated _____**

Child ID No. _____ **Agency: _____**

Please identify all known family issues and whether or not they directly affect school attendance .

Issue/Need	Brief Description of Issues	Directly related to attendance?	Service referral needed?
Chemical Dependency (parent)			
Chemical Dependency (child)			
Child Behavior			
Child Care/Day Care			
Child Learning			

Clothing (for child)			
Conflict with school			
Conflict with other students			
Domestic Violence			
Employment (parent)			
Food			
Health Care/Insurance			
Housing			
Housing related (utilities, sanitation, etc.)			
Mental Health (child)			

Mental Health (parent)			
Physical Health (child)			
Physical Health (parent)			
Public Assistance (MFIP, SSI, etc.)			
Transportation			
Lack of communication /poor communication with the school			
Language Barrier			
Other			
Other			

Initial Contact Date: _____ Unable to Contact Date:_____
Refuse Service Date:_____
Reason:

.

Appendix F

Truancy Assessment Service Center (TASC)

Risk Indicator Survey I

Compiled by: ___ School staff **___ TASC staff**

Defiant

____ Argues with authority figures

____ Uses obscene language or gestures

____ Other _____

Manipulative

____ Sneaky

____ Distorts truth

____ Blames others for mistakes

____ Other _____

Aggressive

____ Bullies/threatens/intimidates others

____ Hits/Bites peers or teachers

____ Breaks or throws object

____ Other _____

Isolated

____ Ignored by peers

____ Rejected by peers

____ Withdrawn

____ Other _____

Parental Attitudes

____ Minimizes child's problems

____ Blames others for child's behavior/performance

____ Unresponsive to attempts to make contact

____ Other _____

Attention Seeker

____ Wants teacher's undivided attention

____ Causes class disruptions

____ Talks at inappropriate times

____ Other _____

Emotional Response

____ Inappropriate response to correction

____ Lack of empathy

____ Flat affect – just stares

Unmotivated

____ No desire to learn

____ Not prepared daily

____ Frequently has no homework

____ Does not express joy

____ Other _____

____ Exhibits little curiosity

____ Other _____

Risk Taking Behaviors

____ Harms self intentionally

____ Sexual acting out

____ Suspected substance use/experimentation

____ Risky physical behaviors

____ Steals

____ Other_____

____ Lack of school supplies

Unstable Home Life

____ Poor hygiene

____ Regularly complains of hunger

____ Inappropriate clothing for weather

____ Suspected substance abuse by adult in home

____ Chronic illness/ lack of medical care

____ Other_____

Developmental Issues

____ Sucks thumb

____ Enuresis

____ Sleeps at inappropriate times

____ Eating problems

____ Speech/language/hearing problems

____ Other_____

Hyperactivity

____ Can't sit still

____ Short attention-span for age/grade

Comments: _____

_____

_____

Risk Indicator Survey II

Medical

_____ Lack of required immunizations

_____ Asthma

_____ Head lice

_____ No medical doctor's excuse

_____ Parental health problems

_____ Medication compliance issues

_____ Medical equipment needs

_____ Dental health problems

_____ No documentation of health problems

_____ Other chronic health concerns

_____

_____

Family Social Support

_____ Lack of appropriate child care

_____ Poor parenting practices

_____ Lack of parental support for school attachment

_____ Suspected child abuse

_____ Suspected child neglect

_____ Suspected parental gambling problem

_____ Suspected illegal activity in household

_____ Other family support problems

_____

_____

Financial

_____ Lack of utilities

_____ Insufficient housing

_____ Insufficient food

_____ Transportation problems

_____ Insufficient income

_____ Inadequate clothing/uniforms

_____ Reduced/free lunch

_____ Other financial concerns

Transient related Problems

_____ No permanent address

_____ No birth certificate

_____ No Social Security number

_____ Multiple school transfers

_____ Other transient related problems

_____

_____

_____

_____

Mental Health Related Problems

_____ Parental substance abuse

Educational Problems Not Identified/Addressed by School

_____ Need for evaluation
_____ Need for tutoring
_____ School transportation services
_____ Need for school counseling/social work services
_____ Other educational needs

_____ Child substance abuse
_____ Sibling or other family member substance abuse
_____ Parental diagnosed & treated
_____ Parental diagnosed untreated
_____ Parental undiagnosed
_____ Child diagnosed & treated
_____ Child diagnosed untreated
_____ Child undiagnosed
_____ Sibling/other family member mental health issue
_____ Other mental health issues
_____
_____
