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Transitioning from Elementary to Junior High: Action Research at Bark River-Harris School District

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TRANSITIONING FROM ELEMENTARY TO JUNIOR HIGH: ACTION RESEARCH AT BARK RIVER-HARRIS SCHOOL DISTRICT

By

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Title of Thesis: TRANSITIONING FROM ELEMENTARY TO JUNIOR HIGH: ACTION RESEARCH AT BARK RIVER-HARRIS SCHOOL DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research was to identify factors related to attendance and academics that contribute to student failures and absenteeism in a rural school district. Comparing data between 2012-2013 through 2014-2015, the school district administration recognized a trend in failing grades and absenteeism in the middle school grades. Using a mixed methods design, data was collected from an on-line survey, focus group interviews, teacher interviews and student records. The seventh grade class of 57 students were recruited with twenty-four students participating. The key findings included both teacher behaviors and student behaviors which contributed to the trend in failing grades and absenteeism occurring within this cohort. Recommended actions to improve the trends are included.

DEDICATION

This thesis and the endless hours of work spent focusing on improving the educational experiences for students is dedicated to the class of 2020 at Bark River-Harris School District.

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This thesis follows the format prescribed by the APA Style Manual and the Department of Education at Northern Michigan University.

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INTRODUCTION

The transition between the elementary and middle/junior high school, at Bark River-Harris School District (BRH) occurs after the sixth grade. BRH is a one-building district with three separate wings. These wings include the elementary wing (kindergarten through sixth grade), the junior/senior high wing (seven through twelfth grade), and the specials wing (music, art, and the gymnasium). Because of the district's size, BRH shares resources and personnel across all grade levels. This situation has created many positive opportunities for the students and staff, but it has also created challenges with scheduling and course offerings.

The enrollment at BRH has increased over the past five years. In 2011, the district enrolled 691 students. Five years later, the district enrolled 738 students for a net increase of 47 students. Enrollment data illustrates that BRH enrolls most of the new students in the elementary grades. However, as students progress from the elementary to junior high and into high school, the overall class sizes decrease. To illustrate this point, the graduating class of 2015 graduated thirty-eight students. When this cohort was in seventh grade, there were fifty-six students in the class. Therefore, over the span of junior high and high school, this cohort lost eighteen students. During a recent interview with a female student at Bark River-Harris, the question was asked why she felt this enrollment trend occurred. She replied that, "it is because no one took these students under their wing and asked how they were doing when they were younger" (M. Robinette, personal communication, February 16, 2015). Furthermore, she stated that, "kids go from elementary where their teachers are like their parents to junior high where they are treated like high schoolers" (M. Robinette, personal communication, February 16, 2015). The

implication of Ms. Robinette's comment is that BRH is a single school building with two separate belief systems.

The drop-out/transfer concern among the class of 2015 is not an isolated phenomenon. As illustrated by Table 1, the trend exists among each cohort at Bark River-Harris over the past several years.

Table 1.

Student enrollment trend for Bark River-Harris

	CLASS OF 2015	CLASS OF 2016	CLASS OF 2017	CLASS OF 2018
12th grade	38	47		
11th grade	46	50	43	
10th grade	52	50	50	53
9th grade	58	60	55	55
8th grade	55	54	55	61
7th grade	56	54	59	58

In addition to the enrollment trend throughout junior high/high school, the staff at BRH noticed an increase in the amount of students struggling academically beginning in seventh grade. The trends noticed at BRH are not unlike national trends. The middle years are challenging for many students. Calvert's (2011) writing on Homeroom, "The Official Blog of The United States Department of Education", quotes Deborah Kasak: "Many [students] make the decision to drop out-either consciously or unconsciously-during those middle grades years". Not only are students experiencing all sorts of physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes, but they are beginning to forge their paths for their future and Balfanz (2011) points out students start asking, "Is school for me?"(p. 2). Balfanz (2011) argues, the middle grades may be the most important years in a child's education.

The Institute of Education Sciences National Center's *Dropout Prevention Practice Guide* (2008) indicates that early warning signs such as chronic absenteeism, course failure, and behavioral referrals are predictive and reliable to later issues. The report documents that students with two days of absences in September are sixty-five percent more likely to be chronically absent throughout the year. The BRH Engagement Professional Learning Community (PLC) (further described below) created the ABC's Early Warning Indicators for BRH (see Appendix 3) and used this tool to analyze local data. This group found that over the past three years, the percent of Bark River-Harris seventh grade students hitting these early warning indicators increased. During the 2012-2013 school year, nine percent (N = 5) of the seventh grade students had two or more absences in September. During the 2013-2014 school year, ten percent (N = 6) of the seventh grade students had two or more absences in September and during the 2014-2015 school year, fifteen percent (N = 8) of the seventh grade students had two or more absences in September.

During the 2014-2015 school year, Bark River-Harris embarked on a new school improvement model that focused on two key components of successful school districts (data-based decision making and empowerment of all stakeholders). During this process, eight PLCs were formed to collect and analyze perception data, research the validity of the findings, and develop action plans to address the valid concerns. Based upon input from staff members, board members, community members and administrators, the following PLCs were created: engagement, policy, communication, curriculum (math), technology, district oversight, and district leadership. The purpose of implementing this style of professional development was to

analyze issues, such as the decrease in academic performance in seventh grade and develop plans to rectify the concerns.

The BRH Engagement PLC analyzed data from 2012-2013, and found that at the end of the first quarter, seven percent (N = 4) of the seventh grade had missed five or more days of school. In 2013-2014, at the end of the first quarter, eight percent (N = 5) of the seventh grade missed five or more days of school. During the 2014-2015 school year, at the end of the first quarter, fifteen percent (N = 8) of the seventh graders missed five or more days of school. The BRH trend documents that the numbers have a similar comparison to the Institute of Education Sciences National Center's early warning indicator statistics for Bark River-Harris.

The Bark River-Harris Engagement PLC also discovered that for the first quarter of the 2014-2015 school year, forty-seven percent (N = 26) of the seventh grade class had failed at least one course. This was only one less than the same cohort as fourth quarter sixth graders. Table 2 illustrates the comparison between the number of students within the cohort that failed at least one class during the last marking period of sixth grade as compared to the end of the first quarter in seventh grade.

Table 2.

Students Failing at Least One Class

Number of students (class of 2020)	Quarter 4 (6^{th} grade)	Quarter 1 (7^{th} grade)
57	27	26

Further, as illustrated in Table 3, the total amount of failing grades doubled from the last quarter of their sixth grade year to their first quarter of their seventh grade year.

Table 3.

Total Amount of Failing Grades

Number of students (class of 2020)	Quarter 4 (6^{th} grade)	Quarter 1 (7^{th} grade)
57	36	72

The Engagement PLC also analyzed academic data for three years and found a larger trend. In 2012-2013, Bark River-Harris had eighteen percent (N = 10) of the seventh grade students failing at least one class at the end of the first quarter. In the 2013-2014 school year, the district had twenty percent (N = 20) of the seventh grade students failing one or more classes at the end of the first quarter. Finally, in the 2014-2015 school year, the district had forty-seven percent (N = 26) of the seventh grade students failing at least one class at the end of the first quarter. Table 4 illustrates this three year trend in which the percentage of students in seventh grade failing one or more classes has increased each year over the last three school years.

Table 4.

Failing One or More Course Trend Data

2012-2013 Quarter 1	2013-2014	2014-2015
18% (N=10)	20% (N=20)	47% (N=26)

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to identify factors contributing to the trends in failing grades and absenteeism. The BRH Engagement PLC found that an increasing number of students are showing multiple early warning signs such as failing grades and an increase in absenteeism in seventh grade. These indicators are key predictors of future failures and chronic absenteeism and establish the overarching research question guiding this research: What is the

relationship between student's failure and absenteeism in junior high at Bark River-Harris and future drop-out/transfers? More specially, this research seeks to answer:

1. What factors are contributing to the increase in failing grades and increased absenteeism in seventh grade?
    a. To what extent are those factors related to student behaviors?
    b. To what extent are those factors related to teacher behaviors?

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

As the instructional leader of the Bark River-Harris School District, it is my responsibility to identify why there is an increase in failing grades and absenteeism in seventh grade. I believe that at Bark River-Harris there is a connection between students that struggle in junior high and the drop-out/transfer tendencies in high school. In order for our district to develop research-based action plans to address these concerns, we [BRH team of educators] must first identify the factors causing these alarming statistics. Once we are able to identify why we are seeing an increase in failing grades and an increase in absenteeism, we can begin to address the concern.

Our mission statement at Bark River-Harris states, "To attract, educate, and graduate students with the ability to improve their community". If the enrollment trend continues, we will not be living up to our mission statement. We are not attracting students to our district if we continue to experience an exodus of pupils throughout junior high and high school. We are not educating students if they are not enrolled or in attendance and we certainly are not graduating students if they are failing courses.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Typical schooling in America filters students through a series of transitions that research has indicated causes many students to experience challenges academically, physically, socially, and emotionally. One of the most important transitional periods students experience occurs between elementary school and middle school or junior high school. In fact, not only is this a period of change, but Crockett, Petersen, Graber, Shulenberg and Ebata (1989) paraphrasing Baltes and Nesselroade (1979) argue, "The most dramatic 'normative age-graded' change that many American children face is the transition from an elementary to middle school or junior high school" (p. 181). This event coincides with two of the most important developmental changes humans experience. Those developmental occurrences include puberty and the beginning of maturation of the frontal lobe. This time of human development is often referred to as adolescence. Crockett, et. al (1989) paraphrasing Petersen (1987) describe early adolescence "as a period of change, not only in terms of individual physical and cognitive development, but also in terms of changes that occur in the adolescents' social contexts" (p. 181).

Just as students experience vast change during this period, so do many American school systems. One of the most fascinating aspects of American education is the fact that the organization of elementary schools and middle schools contrast each other so much. Students move from one primary teacher to a departmental program often in a larger school with several teachers, a complex schedule, more students and more involved rules and policies (Weldy, 1995).

As previously mentioned, the transition from elementary into middle school or junior high school may be especially challenging because not only does it often involve substantial

school changes, but also physiological and psychological changes for the student. Though various researchers dispute the level of risk associated with the transition into adolescence, Eccles and Wigfield (2002) state, "These changes have significant impact on a variety of developmental outcomes" (p.159).

Crocket, et. al (1989) examined the impact transitions have on early adolescence. Their research followed 253 middle school students that all experienced various levels of transitions. Using a qualitative research design, these students were divided into three groups: students that experienced only one transition prior to sixth grade, students that experienced only one transition prior to seventh grade, and students that made more than one transition prior to both sixth and seventh grade. The purpose for their study was to examine the impact transitioning had on grades and self-image.

The researchers interviewed and tested the subjects twice during each year between sixth through eighth grade. The original sample size of their study included 335 subjects, but when the data was collected and analyzed only 253 of the subjects were followed. Despite excluding eighty-two students, the sample size and methodology produced valid results. The 253 students all participated in at least four of the six interviews and at least four of the six testing sessions making the data meaningful and comparative.

By examining course grades through the use of coding letter grades on a numeric point system and assessing self-image data using the Self-Image Questionnaire for Young Adolescents (SIQYA), the researchers were able to draw conclusions on the level of impact transitioning has on adolescents. Their findings showed that students that experienced more than one transition performed the worst academically based upon course grades. Results comparing the impact

transitioning had on students that experienced one transition (either prior to sixth or seventh) were not as clear.

Furthermore, the findings related to the self-image interviews showed that there was no significant differences between the groups of students that only transitioned once; however there was a significant effect on gender and the perceptions of body-image; meaning that girls had a lower self-image of their own bodies as compared to boys. Overall, negative effects were found for both groups (students transitioning once and students transitioning more than once). These negative effects were seen in self-image perceptions, but the primary impact of transitioning was found in failing courses. The changes adolescents experience during this time is critical in understanding the needs of these students. In the next section, the developmental outcomes of adolescents are examined.

I. Developmental Outcomes:

The developmental changes occurring within the bodies of adolescences and the rate and age in which puberty affects students is not consistent. During this time, students experience the hormonal and physical changes associated with puberty. What makes this change especially unique is the fact that girls typically experience pubertal changes earlier than boys. Eccles (1999) states, "Girls begin to experience these pubertal changes earlier than boys (by approximately 18 months), so girls and boys of the same chronological age are likely to be at quite different points in physical and social development between the ages of 10 and 14" (p. 38).

Bailey, Giles, and Rigers (2015) paraphrasing Conklin, 2014; Manning and Buchel, 2012, state, "The middle grades can be very tumultuous for students who are navigating profound and often complex changes" (p. 1). As students enter puberty, young adolescents encounter

cognitive, physical, social, and emotional changes that are foreign to them. According to the World Health Organization, adolescence is a process and a time of key changes representing one of life's critical transitions, second only to infancy in terms of the tremendous pace in growth and transformation (2013). As previously noted, pubertal changes occur at different times and at different rates for students in the same grade. This unique difference in the developmental timeline that exists between boys and girls adds yet another challenge both students and educators must be deal with. Key gender differences include staggered level of motivation, self-perception, and social/peer relationships.

Using a mixed method review, Kingery, Erdley, and Marshall (2011) researched the level of peer acceptance and friendship as predictors of adolescent adjustment throughout middle school. Beginning in fifth grade, students were recruited and participated in the Time 1 assessments. Three hundred ninety-seven students were eligible for the study and actively engaged in the activities. The purpose of the study was to identify whether the level of peer acceptance and the number of friends could accurately predict the students' abilities to adjust through middle school. The peer measurements included peer acceptance, friendship nomination, and friendship quality. In order to measure the students' ability to adjust, Kingery, Erdley, and Marshall examined levels of loneliness using the Asher and Wheeler's (1984) Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Questionnaire. Additionally, the researchers measured levels of depression using Kovac's (1979) Children's Depression Inventory. Other categories that were also measured included involvement in school, self-concept, academic achievement, and school avoidance.

Six months after the Time 1 assessments, the students participated in the second round of testing [Time 2]. The students completed the same questionnaires. The results indicated that adolescents' pre-transition social interactions play a key role in their academic success following the transition. Furthermore, as predicted, students that were found to be rejected by their peers were associated with school-related difficulties.

Transitioning from elementary school into middle school or junior high school is not only complex because of the physical changes occurring within adolescence, but also the psychological and emotional changes occurring at this time as well. According to Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman, and Midgley (1991), there is much evidence that children's self-perceptions become more negative in early adolescence, yet there has been some debate about the magnitude and generality of these negative changes, particularly in the case of students' general self-esteem (Wigfield, et. al, 1991). Research has found that there is a correlation between the level of anxiety adolescents experience and effective school transition strategies. Richardson (2002) focused her research on the emotional intelligence of students and found that "students with more emotional intelligence skills will be able to cope and adapt more easily, resulting in stronger abilities to succeed both academically and socially" (p. 2). Furthermore, Richardson (2002) noted that this is the reason why some students are able to cope with what she refers to transition trauma.

Wigfield, et. al (1991) studied the impact transitioning had on domain-specific self-perceptions (math, English, social activities, and sports) and general self-esteem. Using a mixed method approach, the researchers attempted to determine if students' self-perceptions in specific domains would change over time. Though their findings are dated, the results shed light on the

importance and impact transitioning has on adolescents. During their research, they studied 1,850 middle school students from across 12 school districts. Their study was a longitudinal study that spanned over the course of seven years. This project was a part of a larger study conducted by the Michigan Adolescence Study. During the first two years of the study, students were asked to complete questionnaires twice each year beginning in the year prior to their first transition (sixth grade). This methodology strategy allowed the researchers to draw conclusions not only from within a school year, but across multiple school years.

Subjects were asked to complete a questionnaire answering a variety of questions using a one through seven scale. Examples of the questions students were asked included: "How good are you at math?" or "How good are you at making friends?" Students were divided into three groups based upon aptitude (high, average, and low). Several key findings, according to Wigfield, et. al (1991) illustrate that:

- Junior school students' lowest scores occurred immediately after the transition to junior high (beginning of seventh grade).
- Boys had higher self-esteem than girls.
- Adolescents rated as high based upon aptitude had the highest self-esteem.
- Self-esteem rose by end of seventh grade.

Though the body of research varies regarding the level of significance these changes have on successful school experiences, different theorists have proposed that these changes can have a significant impact on students' self-perception and self-esteem. Research by Eccles, Midgley, and Adler (1984) indicates that many young adults become negative about school and themselves after the transition to junior high. Furthermore, some studies suggest that

adolescents' beliefs about specific content areas become more negative during these times. Despite the challenges adolescents face, schools throughout America have identified effective ways to educate these students. In the next section, various proven methods are explored.

II. What works – Effective Transition Strategies

According to Conklin (2014), "When it comes to young adolescents in America, Americans seem determined to perpetuate a narrative of hormones and horror" (p. 2). Despite these undesirable perceptions, middle school can be a time of great growth, both academically and socially. The research has indicated that students that attend schools with effective transition strategies are likely to be more successful throughout the rest of their life. According to Balfanz (2009), successful experiences in middle grades have been linked to future academic success for students. Balfanz (2009) states, "A student's middle grades experience is critical to his or her life's chances. It is during the middle grades that students either launch toward achievement and attainment, or slide off track and are placed on a path of frustrations, failure, and ultimately, early exit from the only secure path to adult success" (p. 13).

School systems that recognize and understand the complexity of adolescents are much more likely to be successful at educating middle school students. Though there are varying opinions on 'what works' in middle schools, there are research based strategies that have been documented to be effective. To illustrate this point, Figure 1 and Figure 2 below list recommendations from both the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1990) and the National Middle Schools Association (1990).

Figure 1.

Recommendations for Restructuring Educational Practices in Middle-Grade Schools from Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development

- Turn large schools into smaller learning communities.
- All students should receive a common core of high-level knowledge.
- All students should be given the opportunity to succeed.
- Teachers and administrators should be empowered to make important decisions.
- Middle-grade teachers should receive special preparation for teaching at the middle school level.
- Early adolescent fitness and health should be enhanced to enhance their academic performance.
- Families should be re-engaged in middle schools.
- Connections between schools and communities need to be built.

Figure 2.

Recommendations for Restructuring Educational Practices in Middle-Grade Schools from the National Middle School Association

- Middle school educators should be knowledgeable about your adolescents.
- The middle school curriculum should be balanced and responsive to the needs of young adolescents.
- There should be a range of organizational arrangements in middle schools.
- Instructional strategies should be varied.
- There should be full exploratory programs in different schools.
- Comprehensive advising and counseling should be provided for all students.
- All students should make continuous progress.
- Evaluation procedures should be compatible with the nature of your adolescents.
- Teacher should have time for cooperative planning.
- Each middle school should have a positive school climate.

Comparing the data in the figures above, each of the strategies have one thing in common and that is these strategies involve the behavior/decisions made by adults. Schools that focus on improving the educational experiences for middle school aged students must first recognize and understand the complexities happening within the lives of each middle school aged student and secondly, be able to address these changes with effective practices.

According to Wormeli (2002), there are several common and universal strategies found throughout many school districts, including: (1) having students as soon as fifth grade visit the middle school they will be attending, (2) having parents attend middle school orientation meetings, and (3) having middle school teachers visit elementary classrooms to talk about what middle school is like. Furthermore, Wormeli (2002) suggests that effective transition programs should include five (5) key mind-sets. Figure 3 below illustrates these principles:

Figure 3.

Essential Characteristics of Effective Transition Programs:

- Understanding students' concern about belonging.
- Empathizing with students.
- Understanding the characteristics of the age group.
- Focusing on the positive.
- Building hope.

Examples of school districts that have embraced these principles have seen noticeable improvements in students' academic performance and student self-perceptions. Additionally, students that go through middle schools that incorporate these beliefs have lower high school drop-out rates. To illustrate this point, the Georgia State Department of Education published an educational manual that they distribute to each of their teachers, students, and parents. This manual, *Middle school Matters: A guide for Georgia Schools on Middle School Transition* (n.d.) acts as a toolkit of transition activities and strategies. According to the guide, "School transition is not a 'one size fits all' approach, but a framework that includes strategies as well as policies and procedures tailored to meet the needs of students, schools, and communities" (p. 4). Many districts incorporate the recommendations listed above; however, other districts add additional components that exceed the aforementioned recommendations. The Bayport-Blue Point School District (2013) in New York has implemented a transition plan that includes a three pronged

approach. According to Bailey, Giles, and Rogers (2015), this district's plan included: (1) a student ambassador program (2) middle school visits, and (3) summer visits. Both of these examples illustrate the attention to student needs and meet the five key concepts suggested by Wormelli (2002).

Changes, both physically and psychology, play an important role in understanding academic struggles experienced by adolescent learners. Both boys and girls show a significant increase in psychological distress across this transition period (Chung, Elias, & Schneider, 1998). Even though declines in achievement and increased distress are not gender exclusive, boys tend to show a significant drop in academic achievement, while girls seem to experience a greater level of psychological distress after the transition (Chung et al., 1998). These internal pressures that adolescents deal with are compounded by the social and organizational changes within schools and are magnified during transitioning from elementary school to middle school.

Based upon the aforementioned research, adolescents appear to have the odds stacked against them. The physiological, psychological, and social-emotional changes these children experience can be overwhelming. Furthermore, the lack of understanding of these changes by adults has been found to compound the challenges [for both the adolescents and the adults]. In conclusion, there is a perceived uphill battle these adolescents face; yet research has identified numerous ways to effectively assist students through these challenging times. In fact, as educators become more familiar with the body of research on the topic, vast improvements to school systems will follow.

METHODS

Transitioning from Elementary to Junior High at Bark River-Harris (BRH) School District utilized an action-research methodology to guide the selection of participants, collections and analysis of data. In what follows the research design was purposeful in an attempt to discover root causes for the increase in failing grades and absenteeism. The research was conducted over a two-year period of time and was designed to compare student perception data to actual student data related to grades and attendance. Teacher interview data was used as a means of interpreting the student data and developing action plans to address the growing trends in absenteeism and failing grades. Through the use of on-line surveys, focus group interviews, teacher interviews, and student data collection, the researcher attempted to answer the research question: What factors are contributing to the increase in failing grades and increased absenteeism at Bark River Harris School District? The purpose of the study was to provide data to the educators of BRH in order to develop current and future plans in an effort to rectify the identified concerns.

Action Research:

The purpose of action research, according to Creswell (2008), is to identify a specific issue and through the research, obtain possible solutions to rectify the issue. Furthermore, Creswell (2008) notes, "Of all the research designs, action research is the most applied, practical design. Action researchers explore a practical problem with an aim toward developing a solution to a problem" (p. 576). Through the work of action research, both qualitative and quantitative data can be explored, which adds considerably to the body of research collected. Mills (2011) describes action research as a systematic procedure educators can use to collect data and

subsequently develop plans for improvement. This research design is ideal for school districts seeking to focus on improvement. According to Hendricks (2006), action research is a process of self-study that engages key-stakeholders in the research process and improvement planning process.

In the context of this specific study, the researcher focused on participatory action research. Stinger (2007) describes participatory action research as a method to improve the quality of organizations, communities and family lives. Though action research and participatory action research have many commonalities, the primary difference is that participatory action research has its place in educational settings. Creswell (2008) further illustrates this point by emphasizing that when participatory action research is "applied to education, the focus is on improving and empowering individuals in schools, systems of education, and school communities" (p. 583).

Action research, according to Creswell (2008), is an informal process of research in which educators engage in a study of their own practice. In regards to this study, the researcher used findings from the district's PLC to identify the population to study. In the specific case of this study, the seventh grade class (class of 2020) was identified as a cohort hitting many at-risk factors and therefore was selected to participate.

Engaging others in the research is a common characteristic of action research and often times this collaborative approach results in co-participants in the data collection and data analysis process (Creswell, 2008). In the context of this specific study, the students and teachers were engaged in the process. The researcher used student focus group interviews and student on-line surveys to collect student perception data. Additionally, the researcher considered

information gathered during teacher interviews while developing the action plan to address the concerns identified in this study.

Researcher and Researcher Bias:

The researcher is a Native American male who at the time of the study was also the school district's superintendent. The research conducted was a part of an action research assignment for obtainment of an Education Specialist Degree through Northern Michigan University. Additionally, the researcher has two daughters enrolled in the school with one being a member of the cohort studied. The researcher has been intimately involved with the continuous improvement of the school district, including the work within the junior high. As the instructional leader of the school district, the researcher has a vested interested in the improvement of academics and attendance. The researcher has also played a key part in staffing decisions related to the instructional staff at the school district.

Setting:

The research conducted took place over a two year span and followed 7th grade students quarterly through their 7th and 8th grade years. The focus group interviews and on-line surveys were conducted in the fall of the cohorts' 7th grade school year immediately following the end of the first marking period. Both the on-line surveys and focus group interviews were conducted during school hours with the interviews taking place in the superintendent's office. The teacher interviews and data analysis followed the on-line surveys and focus group interviews and were conducted during the 2015-2016 school year.

Various instructional techniques and strategies were implemented throughout the junior high during this time period and attendance rates and academic performance were monitored

quarterly utilizing the district student data-base system (Powerschool). Additionally, during the course of the study, various junior high teachers implemented variations of district policies (Appendix 4, 5, 6) in an attempt to improve student performance. Other attempted strategies included the implementation of a truancy officer; adding mentoring programs; implementation of transition strategies; implementation of organizational strategies utilizing iPad applications; creation of an after-school tutoring program; addition of elective courses and the creation of an early warning indicator checklist for teachers.

Data Source and Participants:

The researcher collected data from multiple sources: student focus group interviews, on-line student surveys, student information compiled from the school's data base, and from teacher interviews. The data sources involving students included only seventh grade students from Bark River-Harris School District. Throughout the study, there were 56 students in this cohort and all of the students attended one junior high. The gender composition of the cohort was made up of 25 boys and 31 girls. The school district is located next to the Hannahville Indian Community and therefore, 12.5% of the students in this cohort were Native American (N = 7), 77% of the students were Caucasian (N = 43), 2% of the students were Hispanic (N=1), and 12% of the students were unclassified (N = 5). An unclassified student is the result of the parent not providing the necessary information to the school district and therefore these students are entered into the data base as unclassified. Additionally, 54% of this cohort qualified for free/reduced lunch (N = 30).

Procedures:

In an attempt to answer the key research question of what factors are contributing to the increase in failing grades and increased absenteeism in seventh grade, the researcher examined data provided by the learners in the form of student surveys and student focus groups. All seventh grade students were recruited and asked to voluntarily participate in an on-line survey. After completing the survey, the participating students were asked to participate in follow-up focus group interviews. Only students who provided consent participated. Using a random selection procedure, three focus groups were created with three students in each focus group. Once these two tasks were completed, three junior high teachers and the researcher coded the data (further described below) and developed themes. The junior high teachers that participated in the coding process have taught in the district between two and three years; however, each have over five years of teaching experience when including time spent teaching in other districts. These teachers teach seventh and eighth grade math, social studies, and special education. They were selected to participate in this process because of their interest in improving the teaching and learning occurring at BRH. Teacher interviews, along with academic and attendance comparisons were made throughout the 2015-2016 school years.

2014-2015 data collection:

I. Seventh grade survey

- All students were recruited. This involved the researcher meeting with the students to summarize the study and educate the students on the consent requirements.

- Two email reminders were sent out to the students to remind them about the required parental consent form and the student consent forms.
- A consent notice was sent to parents reminding them of the required consent form.
- Once the consent forms were collected, the students were emailed the survey link.
- The results of the survey were tabulated and analyzed by junior high staff members and the researcher.

II. Seventh grade focus group interview

- After the survey data was analyzed, students were randomly assigned into focus groups. Three groups were created with three students in each group.
- Focus group interviews were conducted in the superintendent's office. The responses were recorded using the researcher's iPhone.
- The responses were open coded. Creswell (2008) defines Open Coding as the process used by the grounded theorist to form initial categories of information about the phenomenon being studied.
- Using axial coding, specific themes were identified. Creswell (2008) defines Axial Coding as the process of when the grounded theorist selects an open coding category, positions it at the center of the process being explored (as the core phenomenon), and the relates others categories to it.

2015-2016 data collection:

- Attendance data for seventh grade for the 2014-2015 school year were examine quarterly.
- Academic data for seventh grade - number of failing grades were examined quarterly.

The table below displays the data collection process for this study.

Table 5.

Data Collection 2014-2015 and 2015-2016

Data Collection	Cohort	Academics	Attendance
	Class of 2020	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 *Compare the number of failing grades by quarter*	Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 *Compare absenteeism by quarter*

- Teacher interviews were conducted.

Analyses procedures:

Once the students finished the on-line survey, the data was analyzed by a team of junior high teachers. This member check process (Creswell, 2008) assisted with inter-rater reliability and further assisted in narrowing down the data into meaningful themes. Based upon the data gathered from the student surveys, action plans were developed and implemented for the remainder of the study. Student focus group interview results went through an open coding process. Once the original information was funneled down into sub-categories, an axial coding process took place to develop themes. The junior high teachers received training in this process and assisted with the analysis of the student interview data collected and with the development of various action plans.

The student academic and attendance information were pulled from the district's student data management system known as Powerschool. Comparisons were made across various school years for the class of 2020.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to identify key factors contributing to the increase in failing grades and absenteeism occurring within a cohort of students. The trend data related to the factors for this cohort, as well as students that have already gone through middle school, points to a connection in the drop-out/transfer rate occurring in high school. Through the action research, the researcher hoped to discover whether or not these factors were related to student behaviors or to teacher behaviors. In order to answer the research question, various data collection processes occurred. The first two methods of data collection (student survey and focus group interviews) sought to collect student perception data related to student behaviors. The third data collection procedure (analysis of actual attendance reports and grades) was an attempt to identify comparisons to student perceptions. The final set of data collected came as a result of teacher interviews. On two separate occasions, the researcher met with a team of teachers to discuss the findings and to identify viable actions to address the concerns identified throughout the study.

Student Survey:

During the 2014-2015 school year, the cohort of seventh grade students were asked to complete an on-line survey. The survey consisted of seven questions, including:

- What are your current grades?
- What is your most difficult class and why?
- Based upon your answer to question 2, answer the following: In your most difficult class, do you have any zeroes? If yes, why?

- Slide the bar to most closely reflect your answer to the following question. In my most difficult class, I think… (0 means I cannot do the work, 100 means I can totally do the work).
- What do you do when you need help with school work?
- Slide the bar to most closely reflect your answer to the following question. How hard are you trying … (0 means not at all, 100 means I try my best)?
- How many adults, at school, have you ever spoken to about your most difficult class?

Twenty-four out of the fifty-seven students (forty-two percent) completed most of the survey with one student not completing the first question. The first question examined how well the students perceived to be doing in each of their four core subject areas. The question was designed to examine what the students' self-perception was on how well they were doing in class and asked, 'What are your current grades'? The survey indicated that the students felt they were doing much better academically in social studies and English as compared to math and science. Furthermore, the survey indicated that the students felt they were not doing as well in science and math. Overall, the students felt they were doing the best in English with forty-three percent of the students (N = 10) believing they had an A in English. Social studies closely followed behind English with 40% of the students (N = 9) believing they had earned an A. While only twenty-six percent of the cohort (N = 6) felt they had earned an A in math and twenty-two percent of the cohort (N = 5) felt they had earned an A in Science.

Conversely, students felt that they struggled the most in science and in math with thirty percent of the cohort (N = 7) believing that they were earning either a D or F in math and twenty-six percent of the cohort (N = 6) believing that they had earned either a D or F in science.

The second question asked the students, 'What is your most difficult class and why'? The question was designed to compare what the students felt was their most difficult class to the students' perceptions of their current grades. There was a connection between the responses as forty-two percent of the students (N = 10) identified math and forty-two percent of the students (N = 10) also identified science as their most difficult class. This is closely linked to the percentages of students that felt they were failing in both those subjects. Conversely, only sixteen percent of the students (N = 4) felt English was their hardest class while zero percent (N = 0) of the students felt social studies was their most difficult subject.

The follow-up question asked the students, 'Why they perceived these courses to be the most difficult'? Fifty percent of the students (N = 12) felt it was because they did not understand what was being taught. Twenty-one percent of the cohort (N = 5) identified that homework was the root of the problem. Only thirteen percent (N = 3) felt that the problem had to do with the quality of instruction provided by the teacher. This was a key finding in trying to determine what extent of the factors were related to student behavior or to what extent the factors were related to teacher behaviors.

The survey was designed to follow-up on previous questions in an attempt to dive deeper into the root causes of why the district has experienced a spike in failing grades and attendance related problems. The follow-up question asked, 'Based upon your answer to the question above, answer the following: In your most difficult class, do you have any zeros? If yes, why'? Two

students did not respond to this question yet the fifty-nine percent of the cohort (N = 13) that did respond, indicated that they did not have any zeroes. Therefore, forty-one percent of the students that responded (N = 9) indicated they did have at least one zero. Of the nine students responding that they did have at least one zero, twenty-two percent (N = 2) stated it was because they had too much homework. The highest perceived reasons for missing work resulting in a zero according to these nine students were the fact that the work was too hard and because of the school's late work policy (Appendix 6). Thirty-three percent of the students (N = 3) identified these reasons as to why they had zeros. Only one student stated that it was because he/she had no one to help.

The fourth question used a sliding bar to gauge students' perceptions related to their abilities to do the work. The intention of this question was to try and determine if the problem being studied was due to a lack of student motivation or a lack of student ability and asked students to 'Slide the bar to most closely reflect your answer to the following question: In my most difficult class, I think…(0 means I cannot do the work, 100 means I can totally do the work)'. The average value of the results for this question was 68.71 with the minimum value at 30 and the highest value at 100. Therefore, the average value indicates that nearly seventy percent of the students felt they had the ability to do the work. This was also a key finding in attempting to answer the research questions.

Focusing on homework, the survey asked the question, 'What do you do when you need help with homework'? For this question, students were allowed to select more than one response. The responses the students could select from included: (1) ask for help, (2) ask for help from a peer, (3) ask for help from a teacher, (4) ask for help from peers, (5) look for help on-line or in a

book, and (6) other. Thirty-eight total responses were recorded and the choice with the highest amount of responses was 'ask for help from a teacher'. Thirty-four percent of the responses (N = 13) indicated that they would ask for help from their teacher. Asking for help from a parent was the next highest selection with twenty-one percent (N = 8). The cohort indicated that asking for help from peers and looking for help on-line or in a book was not as prevalent. Merely sixteen percent of the responses fell into these two selections. The question was designed to determine whether or not students had specific strategies for asking for help when it was needed.

The second to the last question asked the students to use a sliding bar to determine how hard they are trying in school by subject area and asked, 'Slide the bar to most closely reflect your answer to the following question. How hard are you trying…(0 means not at all, 100 means I try my best)'? The goal of this question was twofold. First of all, the question was designed to determine if the root of the problem stems from a lack of motivation or ability. Secondly, the question was designed to determine if there was a connection between the class they felt was difficult (as determined by a previous survey question) and how hard they tried in that particular class. Interestingly enough, there was a connection between the classes students identified as their hardest and how hard they work in that class. Based upon the earlier survey question that asked students which class was their hardest, forty-two percent of the cohort identified math and science as their hardest class. Based upon the results of this question, math and science had the lowest value scores (math = 87.13 and science 84.29). Therefore, classes that students perceive to be their hardest are the same classes that students are trying the least in. Conversely, social studies and English were two classes that previously students identified as their easiest (or least hard) and also received the highest value in how hard the students. Social studies was identified

as the least difficult with 0% of the students identifying this class as such. This class received the highest value on how hard the students work with 88.88. English was the second least difficult class with sixteen percent of the cohort (N = 4) indicating such and this subject also received the second highest value on how hard the students work with a value of 87.29. Therefore, the harder the class is perceived to be, the less hard the students work in those classes. The easier the classes are perceived to be, the harder the students work in those classes. This is the third key finding from this survey.

The final question asked the students. 'How many adults, at school, have you ever spoken to about your most difficult class'? The intent of this question was to try and determine if there were barriers preventing students and educators from discussing challenges students experience. The results of this question indicated that there may be such a barrier. Thirty-three percent of the students (N = 8) did not feel they had any adult, at school, they could talk to about their hardest class. Twenty-nine percent (N = 7) felt there was one adult, at school, they could talk to about their hardest class. Twenty-five percent (N = 6) felt there were two adults, at school, they could talk to about their hardest class. These percentages indicate that the students do not believe they have anyone (or very few people) to confide in about the challenges they face with their classes.

Key findings of survey:

There were three key findings that provided evidence for answering the research question (what factors were related to student behaviors or to teacher behaviors).Those key findings are:

- Thirteen percent (N = 3) of participants felt that the problem had to do with the quality of instruction provided by the teacher; therefore, eighty-seven percent felt the quality of instruction was not the problem.

- Seventy percent of the students felt they had the ability to do the work.
- The harder the class is perceived to be, the less hard the students work in those classes and the easier the classes are perceived to be, the harder the students work in those classes.

Focus Group Interviews:

The second set of data collected through this study came from focus group interviews. Nine students were randomly selected and placed into three focus groups. The focus groups were asked ten questions, including:

- In your opinion, what is the difference between elementary and junior high?
- On average, how many hours of homework do you have each night?
- Do you feel organized?
- Do you feel you have good study skills?
- What do you do if your parents can't help you with homework?
- What about your daily schedule would you change if you could?
- Why is it important to do well in school?
- How important is spending time with friends?
- What do you want to become when you grow up?
- What is the highlight of your day?

The interview questions were designed to delve deeper into the students' experiences at school to try and determine root causes as to why there is an increase in failing grades and absenteeism beginning in seventh grade. The first question asked, 'In your opinion, what is the difference between elementary and junior high'? Three themes developed among the focus

groups including: transitioning from room to room in junior high versus one classroom in the elementary; more responsibility in junior high as compared to elementary; and the work in junior high is much harder. Student A in Focus Group A stated, “In junior high, you are moving from class to class and you get to see all the different teachers”. The strongest theme that developed from this question was centered on transitioning from room to room. However, the level of difficulty and the increase in responsibility were also prevalent. Student B in Focus Group 2 stated, “Junior high is very different. At first you get easily confused and do not know where to go. By the end of the first week, you get used to the schedule”.

The next question asked students to think about their typical homework load and asked, ‘On average, how many hours of homework do you have each night’? Two themes developed based upon the student responses. The first theme was that it really depends on the class. Some classes, such as social studies, do not have much homework at all; while other classes, such as science or math, tend to have more homework. Overall, the students describe having approximately 1 to 2 hours of homework every night. This is the first key finding from this data source. The connection between this question’s responses and the on-line survey question response that indicated science and math are the most difficult courses is of interest. The perception that science and math are the most difficult class, along with the fact that the students indicate they try the least hard in these classes on top of the fact that these are the classes that produce the most homework helps to make the connection between the three findings. The sequence of these classes (science and math), which have the most homework, leads to the students perceiving them to be the most difficult and therefore results in the students trying the least hard.

Organization is a critical attribute that can often lead to success. The third question asked 'Do you feel organized'? The results of this question varied and no clear theme or position was determined. Fifty percent of the students felt they were organized and fifty percent of the students felt they were not organized. Basic organizational strategies were listed, such as: placing books in lockers in the order of the courses throughout the day, utilizing color coded folders, and utilizing planners. However, an equal amount of responses indicated that assignments and class notes are typically placed in either the bottom of the locker or within the textbook. Student C in Focus Group 3 stated, "I only go to my locker two times a day, for science and social studies. Otherwise, I do not need to worry about my stuff". Based upon the responses, it was clear that an equal amount of students are just as unorganized as there are students that are organized.

Along the same lines as organization, the next question asked 'Do you feel you have good study skills'? Most of the students responded that they do not study. Several of the responses indicated that it depends on the subject. Much like the responses to the question related to how much homework students have, various subjects are perceived to require more studying. Student C in Focus Group 2 stated, "Science just drags on and is not interesting. The more interesting the class is, the more I like to study". Furthermore, student B in Focus Group 2 echoed the sentiment by indicating, "If it is English, we know English and we can just fly by it, but like in math, we learn so much math that it is confusing". The overarching theme that developed from the responses to this question was that either students do not study or the amount of time studying varies depending on the course. The harder the course, the less time students spent studying the content. This is another key finding that is closely related to other key findings. Students that perceive subject areas to be difficult tend to have more homework in

those classes, have more zeros in those classes, work less hard in those classes and study less in those classes.

When students struggle, they often do not know where to turn for help and this can result in missing work, confusion, or a lack of mastery of the content. The fifth question in the survey asked, 'What do you do if your parents can not help you with homework'? The overwhelming theme that developed through the student responses for this question was the fact that the students turn to the internet. Student C in Focus Group 2 summarized this theme by indicating, "I go to answers.com. This is like my life-line. It is blocked on my iPad, but I have the internet at home." One student indicated they would ask a family member and two students indicated they would wait and ask their teachers at a later time. However, these responses were within the minority as most students spoke of utilizing some form of on-line assistance.

Further examining what factors may be leading to students struggling with academics and attendance, question six of the interview asked, 'What about your daily schedule would you change if you could'? This question also led to an overwhelming theme. The students articulated a disinterest in the scheduling options provided. The schedule provided for three science classes in one semester. A majority of the students spoke of how they did not like attending science three times in one day. This was a key finding that speaks to the factors leading to student challenges. As previously mentioned students perceive science to be difficult and tend to have more homework in that subject. Additionally, students believe they have more zeros in that subject, work less hard in that subject and study less in that subject. Layer on top of these factors the fact that they spend three class periods in science for one semester and it becomes more clear as to why students are struggling.

Question seven asked, ‘Why is it important to do well in school’? Most students understand the connection between doing well in school and successful futures. Student A in Focus Group 1 stated, “It is important to do well now so you have an education for the real world”. Each student within each focus group spoke of life after high school and how the importance of doing well now will result in a better life in the future.

The link between social interactions at school and success was examined through question eight. When asked, ‘How important is spending time with friends?’, nearly every student indicated this was a very important aspect of school. Student B in Focus Group 2 pointed out that, “It is important or you won’t be happy. You can’t expect to love everything about school, but having friends makes it all worth it”. Only one student suggested that having friends may not be as important as the other students ranked it. This student articulated his position by stating, “I can be social. I like doing my work though, so if I had to choose between doing work or hanging with my friends, I’d pick my work”. This sentiment strongly contrasted the rest of the students’ beliefs related to the importance of friendship and the time spent during school socializing.

The second to last question in the survey was closely linked to a previous focus group question about the importance of doing well in school. Students were asked, ‘What do you want to become when you grow up’? Many students were able to identify a particular career choice, such as chef, journalist, or software programmer. Only one student did not know what she/he wanted to do when he/she grew up.

Finally, the interview wrapped up by asking, ‘What is the highlight of your school day’? The responses varied rather dramatically. Several students looked forward to lunch, while others

listed specific courses (art, social studies, and band). There was no theme that emerged from the responses to this question. However, numerous students mentioned one particular teacher that they enjoyed. Student B in Focus Group 2 indicated that, "I enjoy any time I can spend with my friends, but teacher X is my favorite part of the day. She/he is the highlight of the year. She/he is the reason I do not leave this school".

Key findings of focus group interviews:

From the focus group interview data, there were three key findings used for answering the research question (what factors were related to student behaviors or to teacher behaviors). Those key findings were:

- Science and math classes have the most homework.
- The harder the class is, the less time students spend studying that topic.
- A majority of the students spoke of how they did not like attending science three times in one day, which the researcher has linked to the previous data obtained.

The themes between the on-line survey and the focus group interviews blend together. The bulleted list provides an illustration of the interconnectedness of themes:

- Math and science have the most homework.
- Math and science are perceived to be the most difficult classes.
- The more difficult the class the: (1) less time studying for the class and (2) less hard the students work.
- Students do not enjoy having science three times in one day for an entire semester.

Student Data:

The third data set examined through this study was student records. In my role as superintendent, I have access to academic and attendance reports. The data obtained through the on-line survey and focus group interviews consists primarily of student perception data. While the perception data is a critical component in this study, the information obtained through this third set of data collection is factual.

The cohorts' academic and attendance data was tracked over the course of two years. Table 6 illustrates the number of failing grades per student for the 2014-2015 school year. As represented below, during the first quarter of the 2014/2015 school year, forty-six percent (N = 23) of the students in the seventh grade failed at least one class. This was the first quarter in which these students were in the junior high and it would appear that many students struggled with at least one course. Fifty-four percent of the cohort (N = 27) passed every course they were enrolled in; however, a nearly equal amount of students failed at least one course.

Furthermore, as shown in Table 6, the progression from quarter one through quarter two shows some improvement; however, forty-four percent (N = 22) were still failing at least one class. The number of students failing four, five, or six classes did decrease over the span of the first two quarters. This may be an indicator that the students had begun to effectively transition into junior high and were beginning to experience some success.

The third marking period, which is also the beginning of a new semester, shows the number of students passing all their classes remained the same with fifty-six percent of the class successfully navigating through all of their classes. However, several members of the cohort dipped and one student failed every class she/he was enrolled in. As shown in Table 6, there is

very little improvement in the overall academics. During the final quarter of the 2014-2015 school year, there was little change in the cohorts' performance. Fifty-six percent of the class (N = 28) continued to pass every class; however, forty-four percent of the class (N = 22) failed at least one class. Much like during the second marking period, several students improved as fewer students failed four, five, or six classes. The table below illustrates the first through fourth quarter grades. Overall, comparing the grades per student over the four marking periods, there was very little change. Periodically, some students improved while others did not. The cohort struggled throughout the school year and made little progress academically.

Table 6.

Number of failing grades per student – 2014/2015 school year

	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4	
# of failing grades	Raw N= 57	Percent of Group	Raw N= 50	Percent of Group	Raw N= 50	Percent of Group	Raw N=50	Percent of Group
0	31	54	28	56	28	56	28	56
1	7	12	7	14	7	14	7	14
2	5	9	8	16	6	12	7	14
3	7	12	1	2	3	6	3	6
4	3	5	1	2	1	2	2	4
5	2	4	4	8	4	8	1	2
6	2	4	0	0	0	0	1	2
7	0	0	1	2	1	2	1	2

Extending the data illustrated in the table above, the researcher identified which classes the students failed the most. The table below illustrates the core academic classes per quarter in which the students failed. The findings illustrate a connection between the student perception data and the student data meaning that math and science are two of the classes failed the most often.

Table 7.

Percentage of students failing by course 2014/2015 school year

	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4	
# of failing grades	Raw N= 72	Percent of Group	Raw N= 57	Percent of Group	Raw N= 68	Percent of Group	Raw N=56	Percent of Group
Math	19	26	14	25	15	22	16	29
Science	14	19	12	21	18	26	6	11
English	17	24	14	25	6	9	14	25
Social studies	5	7	3	5	6	9	6	11

Table 8, below, represents the same cohort during the 2015-2016 school year (8th grade). For the first quarter, there was a noticeable increase in the amount of students that passed every class. Sixty-four percent (N = 34) passed every class with thirty-six percent failing at least one class. This was a ten percent increase compared to the first quarter during the 2014-2015 school year. Additionally, no student failed five or more classes which was the first time this occurred during the study and only two students failed three classes and only two students failed four classes.

The trend of improved academics for this cohort continued through the second quarter of the 2015-2016 school year. Seventy-eight percent (N = 43) of the cohort passed every class. This was the highest percent of passing grades this cohort experienced through the study. The grades earned for the third marking period closely reflects student performance of every other marking period throughout the study. Fifty-three percent (N = 28) of the cohort passed every class. This is a decrease of twenty-five percent from the previous marking period. Based upon the data illustrated below, many of the students that had passed every class now failed one class as the percentage of students failing one class increased by eighteen percent. The number of students

failing four, five, or six remained low with only four percent of the cohort falling into this category. This may be a result of the various interventions the district has implemented over the duration of this study.

Though the number of students passing every class did not change much during the course of the study (with the exception of quarter two of the 2015-2016 school year), the number of students failing four, five, six, or seven classes decreased substantially. During the first three marking periods of this study, the number of students failing four or more classes hovered around 12%. By the end of the study, the number of students in this cohort failing four or more classes held steady at four percent. Table 8 below depicts the data aforementioned.

Table 8.

Number of failing grades per student – 2015-2016

	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3	
# of failing grades	Raw N= 53	Percent of Group	Raw N= 55	Percent of Group	Raw N= 50	Percent of Group
0	34	64	43	78	28	53
1	10	19	4	7	14	25
2	5	9	1	2	8	15
3	2	4	4	7	1	2
4	2	4	0	0	1	2
5	0	0	2	4	1	2
6	0	0	0	0	0	0
7	0	0	0	0	0	0

Extending on the data illustrated in table 8, the information in table 9 examines core courses and the percentages in which the students fail these courses. As depicted in the table below, math, science and English continue to be the core courses students fail the most. Additionally, there was a noticeable spike in students failing math during the third marking

period of the 2015-2016 school year. This finding makes an interesting comparison to the student's perceptions related to the classes they believe to fail the most and the actual courses they are failing.

Table 9.

Percentage of students failing by course 2014/2015 school year

	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3	
# of failing grades	Raw N= 34	Percent of Group	Raw N= 26	Percent of Group	Raw N= 42	Percent of Group
Math	11	32	7	27	18	43
Science	9	26	7	27	4	10
English	6	18	4	15	8	19
Social studies	3	9	3	12	5	12

Table 10 represents the number of absences per student for 2014-2015 school year. During this school year, the cohort is in seventh grade. As reflected in the table below, sixty-three percent (N = 35) of the cohort maintained perfect attendance throughout the entire first quarter and twenty-three percent (N = 13) missed only one day. Therefore, eighty-six percent (N = 48) had fewer than two days absent for that marking period. However, two students within the cohort missed between five to seven days and six students missed between two to four days of school during this marking period.

For the second marking period, the number of students with perfect attendance remained fairly stable compared to the first quarter. However, the number of students missing more than two days during the marking period increased by five percent. During the second marking period, twenty percent (N = 11) of the students in this cohort missed two or more days of school.

As the school year progressed, the number of absences increased. As a result of the increase in absenteeism, the percentage of students with perfect attendance decreased. Comparing the second and third marking periods, the decrease in absenteeism equaled a sixteen percent drop. Additionally, the number of students missing more than two days increased by fourteen percent; including two students that had missed between eight and ten days of school.

During the final marking period of the 2014-2015 school year, the percentage of students with perfect attendance remained unchanged as compared to the previous marking period. As shown in Table 10 below, the number of students in the cohort missing more than two days did decrease by ten percent (N = 6) compared to the third quarter data with most of those students missing one day of school.

Comparing the attendance figures between the first marking period of the 2014-2015 school year and that of the fourth marking period of the same year shows an increase in absenteeism. The number of students with perfect attendance decreased by eighteen percent (N = 10). Additionally, the number of students missing more than two days increased by nine percent (N = 5).

Table 10.

Number of absences per student – 2014/2015

	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4	
# of days missed	Raw (N = 56)	Percent of Group	Raw (N = 50)	Percent of Group	Raw (N = 50)	Percent of Group	Raw (N = 50)	Percent of Group
0	35	63	34	61	25	45	25	45
1	13	23	11	20	12	21	18	32
2-4	6	11	7	13	14	25	7	13
5-7	2	4	3	5	3	5	5	9
8-10	0	0	0	0	2	4	1	2
11 or more	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0

Table 11 examines the same data only for the 2015/2016 school year. The cohort is now in eighth grade. The attendance data resembles the academic data (Table 6 and Table 7) for the same time period meaning that there is noticeable improvement in attendance, just as there was noticeable improvement in academics. Comparing the first marking period of the 2015-2016 school year to that of last marking period of the 2014-2015 school year, you'll notice a seven percent increase in the percent of students with perfect attendance. Additionally, you'll notice a twelve percent decrease in the amount of students missing two or more days. Additionally, there was a noticeable decrease in the number of students missing two or more classes as compared to the final marking period of the 2014-2015 school year.

During the first marking period of the 2015-2016 school year, twelve percent (N = 7) of the students missed two or more classes. This is a twelve percent decrease as compared to the fourth quarter of the 2014-2015 school year. However, there was very little change in the number of students with perfect attendance.

The second marking period of the 2015-2016 school year, as shown in the table below, shows no change in the percentage of students with perfect attendance. However, there is a noticeable increase in the percentage of students missing two or more classes as compared to the previous marking period. During this marking period, twenty-five percent (N = 14) missed two or more days. This is a thirteen percent increase compared to the previous marking period.

The last marking period during the study, which was the third marking period of the 2015-2016 school year, shows the trend with attendance resembling that of academics meaning that there was a noticeable decrease from the previous marking period. The number of students

missing two or more days increased to thirty-two percent (N = 18). This was a seven percent increase as compared to the previous marking period. The table below illustrates the attendance data for the 2015-2016 school year.

Table 11.

Number of absences per student – 2015/2016

	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3	
# of days missed	Raw (N = 56)	Percent of Group	Raw (N = 50)	Percent of Group	Raw (N = 50)	Percent of Group
0	29	52	29	52	27	48
1	20	36	13	23	11	20
2-4	3	5	11	20	12	21
5-7	1	2	3	5	6	11
8-10	3	5	0	0	0	0
11 or more	0	0	0	0	0	0

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This action-research study helped to identify numerous factors that are closely linked to one another that may play a role in describing why the cohort in this study continued to struggle academically and with absenteeism. As reported in the Results and Findings section, math and science are the classes the students are failing the most. These classes are also the courses the cohort identified as the most difficult classes. Additionally, these two classes are the courses students in this cohort report that they try the least in and have the most homework in. To compound the issue, the district scheduled students into three sections of science during one of the semesters of seventh grade (2014-2015). It is possible that these factors have contributed the high percentages of failing grades. Examining these contributing factors, it is unclear if the failing grades and absenteeism is a result of student behaviors or class schedule. Rather, it is likely that the issue with failing grades and absenteeism is a result of both.

Examining the connection between absenteeism and failing grades for this particular cohort, the researcher identified that there was no overarching link between the two [absenteeism and failing grades] except during the 3rd marking period of each year. Interestingly enough, the cohort performed the poorest academically during the third marking period of their eighth grade year and as a cohort had the worst attendance data during that same timeframe. This followed a marking period in which the students performed the highest academically.

Additional research on this topic would be beneficial to narrow down the factors that are connecting failing grades and absenteeism. When discussing the data with a team of junior high teachers during the teacher interviews, the researcher asked, ‘What do you feel contributed to the failing grades and absenteeism trends’? “This is hands down all about this cohort. I’ve taught

five other groups of junior high students and none of those groups ever struggled like this" (D. Pretto, Personal Communication, May 13, 2016). Another teacher reported that "This cohort experienced the perfect storm of challenges. This was a challenging group throughout elementary and they transitioned poorly into junior high which hired three new teachers for that year. There was no system in place to support either the students or the teachers" (M. Palmgren, Personal Communication, May 14, 2016).

Though the students indicate that they do not perceive the problem to be caused by a lack of quality instruction there was some conflicting results related to how students get help when they are struggling. According to the on-line survey, sixteen percent of the participants indicate they use on-line venues to assist with homework; however in the focus group interviews the majority of the students indicated that if their parents could not help them they turn to on-line options.

Limitations to this Study:

Less than five miles from the Bark River-Harris School District is the Hannahville Indian Community and Nah Tah Wahsh (NTW) School District. Within this cohort, seven students are Native American. Three of these students transferred out of BRH and into NTW and then back to BRH during the two year period of time this study was conducted. The inconsistency in instruction may have had an impact on the data. Additionally, these three students are also students that failed four or more classes in each of the marking periods during this study.

Within this cohort, two students were identified and became eligible to receive special education services during this study. With the addition of these two students, the special education population increased from six to eight students. This is noteworthy because the courses

these students were enrolled in changed during the period of time in which this study was conducted and contributed to the decrease in failing grades.

During the course of this study, three staffing changes occurred. The science teacher during the 2014-2015 school year left the district and another science teacher was hired. The new hire did not have any prior experience teaching in the middle school; however, he did have over ten years of teaching experience. Additionally, there were two changes in teaching assignments for two other teachers as well. Though these reassignments did not alter the courses offered, it did have an impact on which teachers taught certain elective courses.

Lastly, during the course of this study, two teachers implemented variations of the district's late work policy (Appendix 6). The inconsistency from classroom to classroom may have had an impact on the percentages of students failing in these subject areas.

Future Research:

Though the data collected through this study helps to paint a picture as to what key factors contributed to the trends in academics and absenteeism, further research would be warranted to delve deeper into several findings. Based upon the findings that illustrated noticeable improvement during the first two marking periods of the 2015-2016 school year, followed by a steep decline in performance during the third marking period, additional research into key variables that led to this decline would strengthen this study. The research in this study found that during this timeframe (second marking period through third marking period of 2015-2016 school year) there was a large increase in students failing math. Additional research examining this finding could be critical in the development of action plans to improve student performance.

Another area that warrants additional research that would strengthen this study would be in the realm of instructional strategies utilized in middle school at BRH. Could the relationship between improved academics that occurred between seventh grade and the first two marking periods of eighth grade be caused by the change in course offerings and/or change in faculty? If this relationship was found to be true, then that would help to answer the research question this study attempted to answer.

As previously mentioned, the connection between absenteeism and failing grades for this cohort was not prevalent throughout the duration of the study with exception to the third marking period of the cohort's eighth grade year. However, during the data analysis portion of this study, the researcher did discover very clear links between failing grades and absenteeism for several individual students. Future research into this finding would be extremely beneficial as this could be a critical component that could have implications on the action plans developed for the district.

Lastly, in order to determine if the factors contributing to the failing grades and absenteeism are unique to this cohort or have implications for all future middle school students, the length of this study should be expanded. Though the findings of this research help identify key factors relevant to this cohort, there is no way of knowing if the factors are relevant for other students. This is critical in order to determine if the variables impacting student learning are results of student behaviors or adult behaviors.

Next Steps based upon this study:

During the data collection process, junior high teachers were solicited to analyze data. During this member check process (Creswell, 2008), various strategies were discussed as

possible interventions. The information gathered during these teacher interviews will be used as a part of the district's continuous improvement efforts. Additionally, referenced throughout the study, the BRH Engagement PLC has been a critical friend in identify characteristics that indicate risk factors for our students. In an effort to assist this PLC with their work, the results of this study will be shared with that team. Through our district's problem solving professional development model, this group will analyze the study and make recommendations that will focus on improved teaching and learning.

Over the course of this study, various research based strategies have been implemented to curb absenteeism and improve academics. Several of these strategies include:

- Implementation of truancy officer
- Mentoring (peer and adult)
- Tutoring
- Implementation of iPad applications to assist with student organization
- Additional afterschool programs (fashion club, art club, and robotics)

Cross referencing the times in which these strategies were implemented with the data collected through this study would help to identify the rate of success these strategies have had. A program evaluation that uses the data collected in this study is scheduled to occur during the summer of 2016. Based upon the findings of this evaluation, various strategies will either be eliminated or continue; while new strategies will be examined to replace those that will no longer be implemented.

Lastly, the master schedule for junior high at BRH needs to be examined. The findings of this study indicate that math and science are two classes with which students struggle the most

with and consequently are the classes students are forced to take the most of. Though teacher certification and other scheduling challenges impede our abilities to implement a flawless schedule for all students, there is a strong connection between the number of students failing and the frequency of these classes taken. Expanding on this notion, during the 2014-2015 school year, students that failed science were more likely to also fail lab science or current issues in science (two elective courses students enrolled in). Finding alternative elective courses for students that are more relevant to student interest may result in improved academics and improved attendance rates.

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APPENDIX 1

On-Line Survey Results

Question 1 – What are your current grades?

Social Studies	9/23	As	40%
	3/23	Bs	13%
	6/23	Cs	26%
	3/23	Ds	13%
	2/23	Fs	8%
English	10/23	As	43%
	5/23	Bs	22%
	4/23	Cs	16%
	2/23	Ds	8%
	2/23	Fs	8%
Math	6/23	As	26%
	3/23	Bs	13%
	8/23	Cs	35%
	5/23	Ds	22%
	2/23	Fs	8%
Science	5/23	As	22%
	6/23	Bs	26%
	6/23	Cs	26%
	5/23	Ds	22%
	1/23	Fs	4%

Question 2 - What is your most difficult class and why?

Class:

Math	10/24	= 42%
Science	10/24	=42%
English	4/24	=16%

Why:

Do not Understand –	12/24	50%
Homework -	5/24	21%
Need Accommodations -	4/24	16%
Quality of Instruction -	3/24	13%

Question 3 - Based upon your answer to the question above, answer the following: In your most difficult class, do you have any zeros? If yes, why.

Yes	9/22	41%
No	13/22	59%

WHY?

Too much homework	2/9	22%
Work too hard	3/9	33%
Late work policy	3/9	33%
No one to help	1/9	11%

Question 4 – Slide the bar to most closely reflect your answer to the following question: In my most difficult class, I think… (0 means I cannot do the work, 100 means I can totally do the work).

Minimum Value	30
Max Value	100
Average Value	68.71

Question 5 – what do you do when you need help with school work?

Ask for help	3/38	7%
Ask for help from parent	8/38	21%
Ask for help from teachers	13/38	34%
Ask for help from peers	6/38	16%
Look for help on-line or in book	6/38	16%
Other	2/38	6%

Question 6 – Slide the bar to most closely reflect your answer to the following question. How hard are you trying…(0 means not at all, 100 means I try my best)

Math

Minimum Value	50
Max Value	100
Average	87.13

Science

Minimum Value	0
Max Value	100
Average	84.29

Social Studies

Minimum Value	49
Max Value	100
Average	88.88

English

Minimum Value	38
Max Value	100
Average	87.29

Questions 7 – How many adults, at school, have you ever spoken to about your most difficult class?

0	8/24	33%
1	7/24	29%
2	6/24	25%
3	0/24	0%
4	3/24	13%

APPENDIX 2

Focus Group Interview Responses

Question 1: In your opinion, what is the difference between elementary and junior high?

Focus Group 1:

Student A

- In junior high you are moving from class to class.
- Get to see all the different teachers in junior high.

Student B

- A lot more responsibility in junior high.
- In junior high, we get iPads and need to be responsible for them.

Student C

- More work in junior high.
- You have to spend a lot more time practicing and studying in junior high.

Focus Group 2:

Student A

- Junior high goes by so much faster. The day goes by so fast because you are always moving around.

Student B

- There is a lot of moving and switching classes. In the elementary, you are just in one classroom.
- Junior high is different. At first you get easily confused and do not know where to go. By the end of the first week, you get use to the schedule.

Student C

- Junior high is much harder. The work is much harder.

Focus Group 3:

Student A

- In junior high, you have to switch classes a lot.
- The lecturing in junior is different. You are constantly taking notes and teachers are lecturing in the junior high.

Student B

- There is a lot more homework in junior high.

Student C

- There are fewer breaks in junior high. You get breaks between class, but there isn't recess any more.

Question 2: On average, how many hours of homework do you have each night?

Focus Group 1:

Student A

- None.

Student B

- None, I get it all done at school.

Student C

- I have at least half hour to an hour each night.

Focus Group 2:

Student A

- In Math and Science, we have more than English and Social Studies.
- Most nights I have about three hours of Math.

Student B

- There is about two to three hours each night. Mostly Science and Math.

Student C

- In Science, I was gone for a couple of days and I had to do four huge packets of homework to get caught up. It took a long time.

Focus Group 3:

Student A

- Maybe one of two hours.

Student B

- Sometimes, like last night, I had a lot of review packets. We are studying for exams so we have a lot of packets to do.
- Most nights about half hour.

Student C

- I'd say about an hour.

Question 3: Do you feel organized?

Focus Group 1:

Student A

- Yes.
- Well, have you seen my locker? My locker is nothing but a mess.

Student B

- I do not feel very organized. I put everything in my locker and I dig for what I need.
- I either put my stuff in my locker or backpack.

Student C

- Yes. I put all my work in folders. I also put the books in order of the hour I have the class so when I get ready for class, I know what book to grab. I do the same for my folders.

Focus Group 2:

Student A

- Yes, I guess most of the time.

Student B

- I get certain colored folders for my classes. I try to keep all the old stuff on one side and all the homework on the other.

Student C

- I just put all my notes and homework in book at the end of the hour. I try to keep my stuff lined up by hour.
- I really try to stay organized for science, but all my notes end up in my book. I do put important stuff in my trapper keeper.

Focus Group 3:

Student A

- I felt more organized in elementary. Everything went in my desk and I didn't have to look anywhere for it.
- Junior high is harder to stay organized because everything gets stuffed into lockers.

Student B

- My teachers tell me I am organized, but I just keep everything in one folder.

Student C

- I only go to my locker two times a day, for Science and Social Studies. Otherwise, I do not need to worry about my stuff.

Question 4: Do you feel you have good study skills?

Focus Group 1:

Student A

- I do not really study, but if I do not know something, I ask the teacher. It is Iffy Iffy.
- I think I have a photographic memory and I write down my notes and remember that pricture in my mind.

Student B

- I do not study much either because I understand everything in class. I write stuff down to keep track of it. I think I have a photographic memory also. I remember all the stuff from class.

Student C

- I do not study because I can answer the review questions at the end of a chapter real easy.

Focus Group 2:

Student A

- Sometimes I feel I do. It depends on what we are studying at the time. I think it depends on the subject.

Student B

- If it is English, we know English so we can just fly by it, but like in Math, we learn so much math that it is confusing.

Student C

- In Science, we have a chapter every week and I'll take notes Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday then study on Thursday for Friday's test.
- Science just drags on and is not interesting. The more interesting the class is the more I like to study.

Focus Group 3:

Student A

- No, I've never studied in my life.

Student B

- I study because it seems to be working. I have good grades.

Student C

- I just have a gut feeling on how much I should study. I get good grades and do not have to study hard.

Question 5: What do you do if your parents can't help you with homework?

Focus Group 1:

Student A

- I save the question and ask my teacher in the morning. The teachers give me the help I need.

Student B

- I communicate with my peers on facebook or text a friend for help.

Student C

- I do not have that kind of problem because I understand everything, but if I didn't understand a question, I'd ask my teacher.

Focus Group 2:

Student A

- I look up the answer on-line.

Student B

- I ask my sister. My older sister goes to this school and took the class, so she usually can help me.

Student C

- I go to ansers.com for help. This is like my life-line. It is blocked on my iPad, but I have the internet at home.

Focus Group 3:

Student A

- I check the internet. I type in the question to Google.

Student B

- I go to Google or Ask.com

Student C

- I usually will ask my teacher in the morning. Sometimes they will help and sometimes they do not.

Question 6: What about your daily schedule would you change if you could?

Focus Group 1:

Student A

- Not having the same teacher three times in one day.

Student B

- Same, we have Science three times in one day.

Student C

- Yes, not having the same teacher numerous times in one day.

Focus Group 2:

Student A

- I'd like a longer lunch. I like talking with my friends.

Student B

- I do not like having Math after lunch. I am too tired to do Math at that time.

Student C

- I'd get rid of Science, we take three Science classes and I do not like Science.

Focus Group 3:

Student A

- Lunch is too late in the day. I'm starving by then.

Student B

- I do not like having Science three times in one day.

Student C

- I'd like to take other classes instead of Science all day.

Question 7: Why is it important to do well in school?

Focus Group 1:

Student A

- So you have an education for the real world.

Student B

- Success now will depend on my future. I want to be an experimental physicist so I have to work hard now.

Student C

- I think it is important to develop good study habits now so in college you will have those habits and do well there too.

Focus Group 2:

Student A

- So you can have a good life.

Student B

- I do not think you use everything they teach you. If you get good grades when you graduate, you can go to college and get a good job.

Student C

- To prepare for older life.

Focus Group 3:

Student A

- It is important to do well in school so you can get good grades.

Student B

- My family is full of computer geniuses and they all got scholarships in technology and now work at Staples. You have to do good to get scholarships.

Student C

- To go to college and find a job.

Question 8: How important is spending time with friends?

Focus Group 1:

Student A

- It is very important because you do not know if they are going to leave the school some day.

Student B

- It is very important to gain social skills. When you get a job you need to talk to people all the time. Bonding with friends will help with jobs in the future.

Student C

- I can be social. I like doing my work though, so if I had to choose between doing work or hanging with my friends, I'd pick my work.

Focus Group 2:

Student A

- It is very important. It is the reason I come to school.

Student B

- It is important or you won't be happy. You can't expect to love everything about school, but having friends make it worth it.

Student C

- If you were home-schooled and didn't learn to interact with rude people, how would you be ready for real life?

Focus Group 3:

Student A

- It is very important. Once you leave school and your parents send you off, all you have is your friends.

Student B

- You need someone to comfort you and support you when you feel down.

Student C

- Our schedule allows us time to hang with friends, which is important to do.

Question 9: What do you want to become when you grow up?

Focus Group 1:

Student A

- I want to be a Vet or Biologist.

Student B

- A Chef or Physicist.

Student C

- I do not know.

Focus Group 2:

Student A

- Join the Peace Corp.

Student B

- I want to be a journalist.

Student C

- I want to be a Chef or open a bakery.

Focus Group 3:

Student A

- I want to be a software programmer.

Student B

- I want to do 3D programming like CGI.

Student C

- I do not know.

Question 10: What is the highlight of your school day?

Focus Group 1:

Student A

- Lunch time. The food isn't very good, but I like hanging out.

Student B

- I like the bus ride home. The end of the day is my favorite part because it is over.

Student C

- I love Band class. I love all kinds of music and look forward to that class every day.

Focus Group 2:

Student A

- Lunch.

Student B

- I enjoy any time I can spend with my friends, but Mrs. H is my favorite part of the day. She is the highlight of the year. She is the reason I do not leave this school.

Student C

- Yes, me too. Mrs. H is the best. We had her last year and get to take her again next year. I love her so much.

Focus Group 3:

Student A

- I like the time after I eat my lunch and I can play on my Ipad.

Student B

- I'd say Art of Band. I like those kinds of classes where you do not have to study real hard and can still do good.

Student C

- I like Social Studies because there isn't much homework and then I'd say lunch.

APPENDIX 3

The ABCs of BRH

THE ABC's of BR-H

- **Early Warning Indicators** = Specific data points identified through research that predict a student's likelihood of dropping out of school (sometimes called an Early Warning Sign). While traditionally this is done at the secondary level, we are doing this k-12 to address chronic absenteeism.

- **Indicators** = ABC's
  - Attendance
  - Behavior
  - Course Proficiency

  When put together, these indicators function as one of our universal screening systems. ALL BR-H students are screened 3 x's/year by the Engagement PLC.

- **Early Warning System** = System/Tool for organizing and summarizing indicator data. We currently use Powerschool data and are working towards using Illuminate Dna. Results are tabulated by hand by the Engagement PLC.

- Students identified as at risk will be reported to teachers, parents, and administration so appropriate interventions can be determined and implemented to increase student success.

Risk Indicators	BRH Elementary	BRH Jr.HS/HS
Incoming Risk Indicator	➢ Flag if below benchmark on previous spring CBM or MSTEP ➢ Flag if 1+ Flag on previous end of the year overall engagement indicator	➢ Flag if below benchmark on previous spring CBM or MSTEP ➢ Flag if 1+ Flag on previous end of the year overall engagement indicator
Attendance	➢ Flagged if < 90% for quarter ➢ Flag if absent within first 20 days of school	➢ Flagged if < 90% for quarter ➢ Flag if absent within first 20 days of school.
Behavior: Suspensions, Expulsions	➢ 3 referrals and/or in/out of school suspension	➢ 1 referral and/or in/out of school suspension
Course Fails	➢ 2 course failures (below 60%)	➢ 2 course failures (below 60%)
GPA		➢ Flag if less than 2.0
Mathematics Course Fail	➢ Flag if student failed one or more math course during term and/or is scoring at/below 10th %ile on CBM	➢ Flag if student failed one or more math course during term
ELA Course Fail	➢ Flag if student failed one or more ELA course during term and/or is scoring at/below 10th %ile on CBM	➢ Flag if student failed one or more ELA course during term
Overall Engagement Indicator	➢ # of flags per student during the term.	➢ # of flags per student during the term.

APPENDIX 4

Student Absences Attendance Policy

A) Students will be allowed 4 absences per quarter. These 4 absences include both excused and unexcused absences.

B) If a student requires more time due to a long term illness, frequent medical visits, funeral, family vacation, emergency or other extenuating circumstances the administration must be contacted. Administration must approve the absences and a Pre-Planned Absence Form must be completed and filed on record.

C) Parents are still required to call the school office to excuse student absences. Absences not called in within 24 hours will be considered unexcused.

D) Three tardies in one class during a marking period will count as an absence for that particular class.

E) A student accumulating more than four absences in a marking period without a PrePlanned Absence Form on file is required to make up the absence through Saturday School.

F) One day of Saturday School (8:00am to 12:00pm) will be equal to one regular school day.

G) If a student does not attend a scheduled Saturday School the student will be assigned an out of school suspension for the Tuesday following the missed Saturday School.

Attendance Incentives

A) Students missing 2 or fewer days and receiving zero referrals during the marking period will be entered in a drawing for prizes. Drawings will be conducted after the first and third marking periods and be organized by the school's Student Council.

B) Students missing 4 or fewer days and receiving zero referrals each marking period during the first semester will qualify to participate in event at the end of the semester sponsored by the Bark River-Harris Student Council. The event will be scheduled for a minimum of a half day, but could last up to one full day, depending on the event scheduled. The second semester will also contain an incentive day with the same standards required as the first semester (4 or fewer absences and zero referrals within each marking period).

C) Students not qualifying for the event due to academic or behavior reasons will not be able to attend and will be required to spend the time in a designated area in the school with a school assigned supervisor.

There are two types of absences: excused and unexcused. Excused absences include: illness, observance of a religious holiday, death in the immediate family, family emergency, situations beyond the control of the student, circumstances that cause reasonable concern to the parent/guardian for the student's safety or health, or other reason as approved by the principal. All other absences are considered unexcused. Prearranged excused absences must be approved by the principal. The school may require documentation explaining the reason for the student's absence. In the event of any absence, the student's parent or guardian is required to call the school at (906) 466-5321 before 8:15 a.m. to explain the reason for the absence. If a call has not been made to the school by 10:00 a.m. on the day of a student's absence, a school official will call the home to inquire why the student is not at school. If the parent or guardian cannot be contacted, the student will be required to submit a signed note from the parent or guardian explaining the reason for the absence. Failure to do so shall result in an unexcused absence.

APPENDIX 5

Make-Up Work

If a student's absence is excused, he/she will be permitted to make up any missed work, including homework and tests. The student will be permitted the same number of days as he/she was absent to turn in the make-up work. The student is responsible for obtaining assignments from his/her teachers. Students who are unexcused from school will not be allowed to make up missed work.

APPENDIX 6

Homework Policy

Homework is used as a way for students to practice what they have learned in the classroom. The time requirements and the frequency of homework will vary depending on a student's teacher, ability and grade level.

Student Late Work Policy

Student late work has become an increasing issue over time. In order to allow teachers the ability to enter grades on time and to promote student promptness with turning in homework a school late work policy has been implemented. The school expectation is for our students to turn work in on time. If a student does not turn in an assignment on time they will have one day to turn it in after the due date which will include a 50% deduction off overall final score. Work will not be accepted on the second late day or anytime after and will become a zero in the record book.