

SWARTZ, VICTORIA V.

College of Education, Health and Human Services

A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF PARENTS' EXPERIENCES IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT WHEN DEALING WITH THEIR CHILDREN'S SCHOOL ATTENDANCE (232 pp.)

Director of Dissertation: Susan V. Iverson, Ed.D.

Truancy, which represented 34% of all juvenile status offense cases filed in the United States in 2002, is a major indicator for at-risk students dropping out of school. Researchers have suggested that the development of effective family–school relationships may be a key to curbing truancy.

The participants in this study were six parents of students identified with a pattern of chronic absenteeism and whose absences the parent condoned. The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study was to hear the stories of parents whose children engaged in chronic absenteeism in an effort to develop an understanding of how parents experienced the school environment when dealing with issues related to regarding their children's attendance.

The data revealed that parents' perceptions of the school environment derived not from a single positive or negative experience but instead from a confluence of experiences. Parents' perceptions were also influenced by a multitude of external forces with the potential to damage the social environment of the child and family until it became a toxic one. For some parents, the more negative and challenging these forces were in their lives, the more they adversely affected the way they experienced the school environment.

School district leaders can address parents' negative perceptions of schools and work to counter the effects of socially toxic environments by developing policies to welcome families to the school community, promote inclusive home-school collaboration, and provide safety nets for at-risk children. Above all, school leaders must avoid the assumption that current means of communicating with families are effective.