

ESSA

Boot Camp

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Break Out Session: Chronic Absenteeism

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DEMOCRATS
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CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

An Overview

Students
**CAN'T
WAIT**

Chronic absenteeism is a measure of how many students miss a defined number of school days (often around 15 or more days) for any reason. Research shows that chronic absenteeism is associated with a number of negative consequences for students, including lower achievement, disengagement from school, course failure, and increased risk of dropping out.

How is it measured?

Chronic absenteeism rates are usually measured as the percentage of students missing a certain number of school days, regardless of the reason. Several state education agencies and advocacy organizations calculate chronic absenteeism as the number and percentage of students missing 10 percent or more of their school days. Other states define chronic absenteeism based on a set number of days used. The number of days varies from state to state, ranging from 10 or more days of school missed to 21 or more days of school.

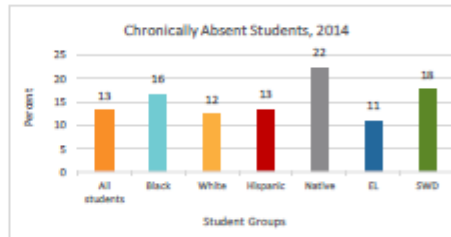
All districts have to report to the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection the percentage of students in each school who miss 15 or more days. Under ESSA, this information must also be included in school report cards.

How is chronic absenteeism different from other measures?

- **Average daily attendance** measures the average number of students who show up on any given day. Most schools have very high average daily attendance rates — often above 95 percent — so this measure does not meet the “meaningful differentiation” requirement in ESSA. Additionally, average daily attendance masks which students are at risk of academic failure due to chronic absenteeism.
- **Tuency rates** only include unexcused absences, while chronic absenteeism includes both excused and unexcused. Research shows that for student achievement, what matters is the number of days a student misses, not the reason — which is why chronic absenteeism is a stronger measure.

What do the research/data tell us?

1. Based on the most recent national data, about 13 percent of students miss 15 or more school days.¹
2. Schools demonstrate higher chronic absenteeism rates for some groups of students — especially low-income students, Native students, and students with disabilities.²
3. On average, schools with higher chronic absenteeism rates have lower proficiency rates, and vice versa, regardless of how chronic absenteeism is defined. This holds for students overall and for each group of students.³
4. On average, schools with higher chronic absenteeism rates also have higher discipline rates for students overall.⁴
5. Research is clear that schools and districts can impact students' absenteeism rates.⁵



Source: Civil Rights Data Collection, 2013-14

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, “2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection: A First Look,” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, June 2016), <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf>.

² Robert Bellizzi and Vaughan Byrnes, “The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools,” (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools, May 2012).

³ Based on an Education Trust analysis of Florida Department of Education, Massachusetts Department of Education, and Michigan Department of Education data.

⁴ Based on an Education Trust analysis of Massachusetts Department of Education data.

⁵ Attendance Works, “Evidence-Based Solutions,” <http://www.attendanceworks.org/research/evidence-based-solutions/>.

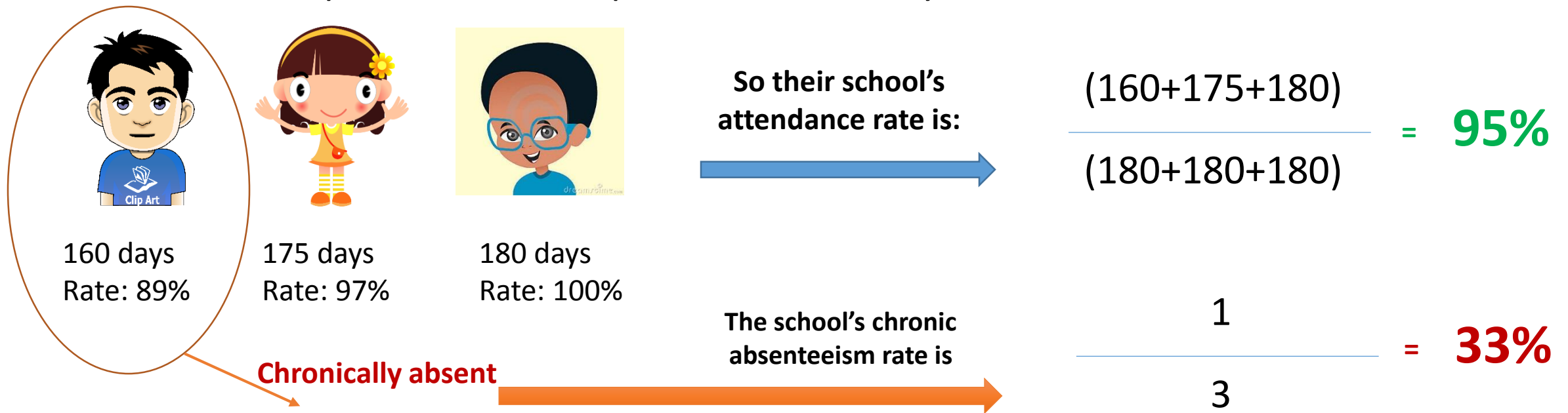
- What is chronic absenteeism?
- How is it different from other measures?
- What do the research/data tell us?
- What are the benefits and risks of including chronic absenteeism in accountability ratings?
- Considerations and questions

What is chronic absenteeism?

- **Broad definition:** “A measure of how much school a student misses for any reason.”
- **Usually measured as:** Percent of students missing X school days.
 - The X varies from state to state.
 - MI – 10+ days
 - FL – 21+ days
 - MA – 10% or more days

How is chronic absenteeism different from other measures?

- **Attendance Rate:** Average number of days a student attended school out of the possible number of days the student could have attended.
 - For example, out of a 180 possible school days, these students attended:



Most schools have very high average daily attendance—often above 95 percent. This means schools will look good on the measure even if they have students at risk of academic failure due to chronic absenteeism.

Also, if all schools look good on a measure, it doesn't meet the ESSA requirement that accountability indicators “meaningfully differentiate” among schools.

How is chronic absenteeism different from other measures?

- **Truancy rate:** Truancy includes only unexcused absences (while chronic absenteeism includes both excused and unexcused absences).
 - While the distinction between excused and unexcused absences matters for deciding how to intervene, for student achievement, it's the number of absences that matters, not the reason.

What do we know from the research?

- **Patterns in absenteeism: (Based on Balfanz, 2012)**
 - Low income students and students with disabilities are more likely to miss school than their peers.
 - Absenteeism starts in kindergarten, then drops off in elementary grades, before climbing back up in middle grades, and even further, in high school.
 - High absenteeism rates tend to be concentrated in certain schools and districts.

Source: Balfanz, R. and Byrnes, V., 2012, The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools

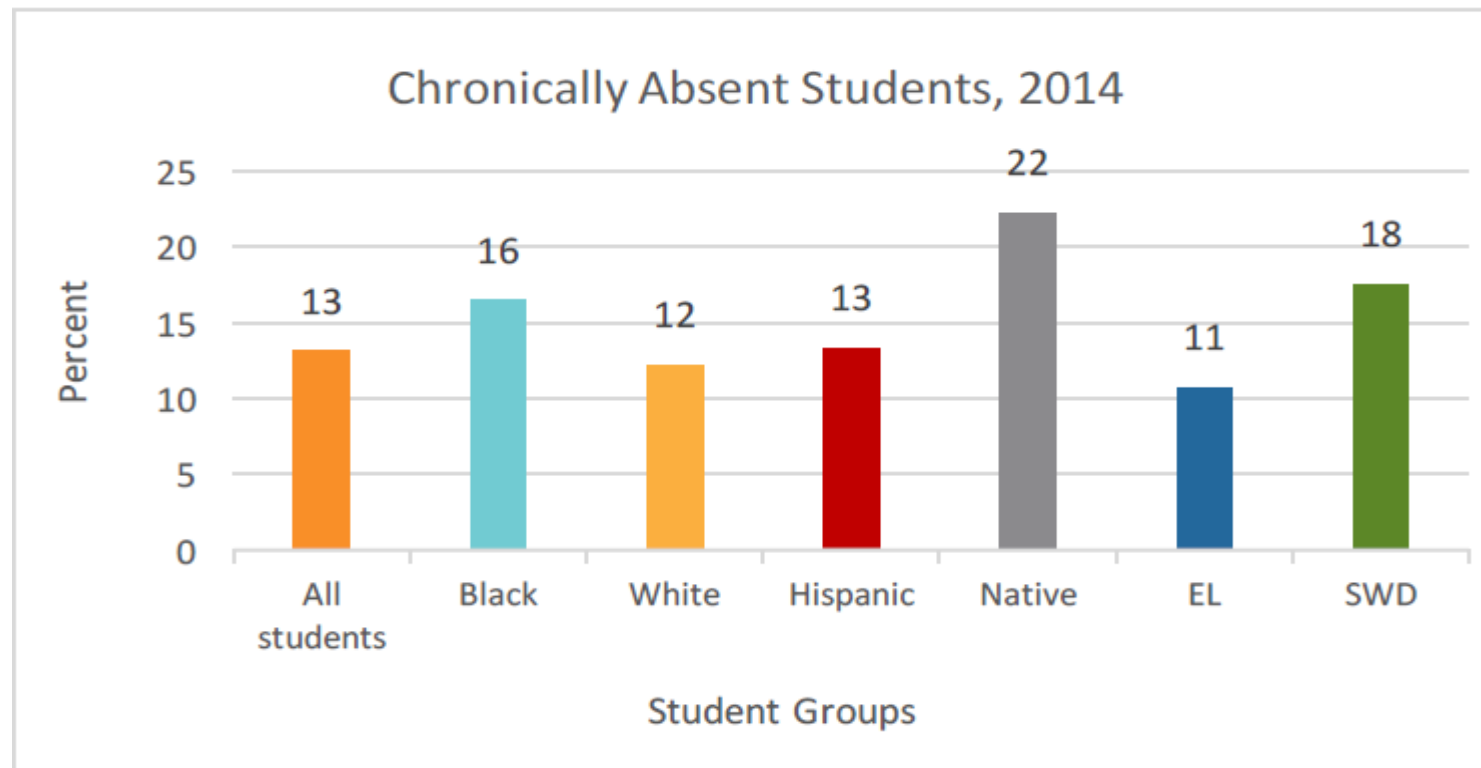
What do we know from the research?

- **Impacts of absenteeism:**

- Chronic absenteeism is associated with a number of negative consequences for students, including lower achievement and higher chances of dropping out.
- Some studies show greater negative impacts for students from low-income families.

What do we see in the data?

Nationally, about 13 percent of students miss 15 or more school days, and schools demonstrate higher chronic absenteeism for some groups.

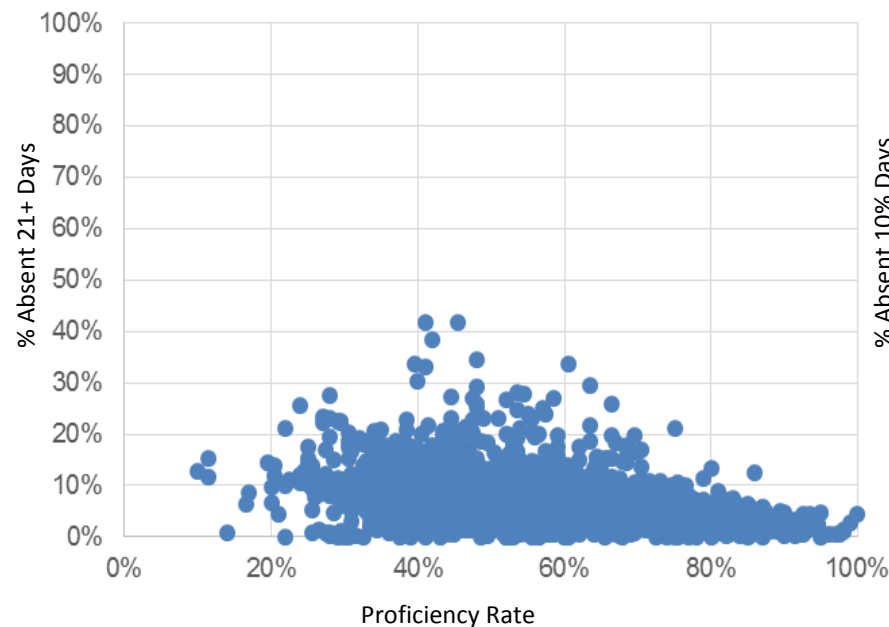


Source: Civil Rights Data Collection, 2013-14

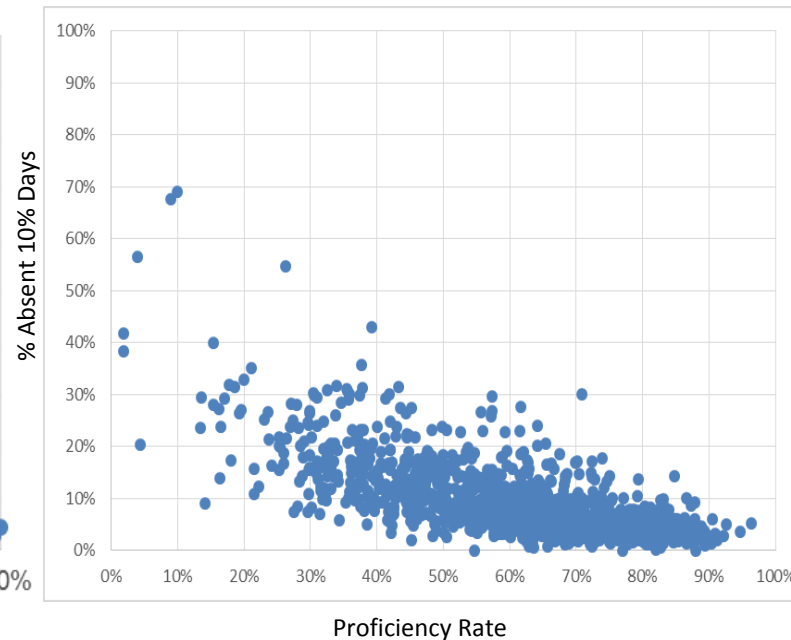
What do we see in the data?

- FL, MA, and MI all define chronic absenteeism differently (FL = 21 days; MA = 10% of days, or about 18; and MI – 10 days). But **the relationship between proficiency and chronic absenteeism is strong** in all three states.

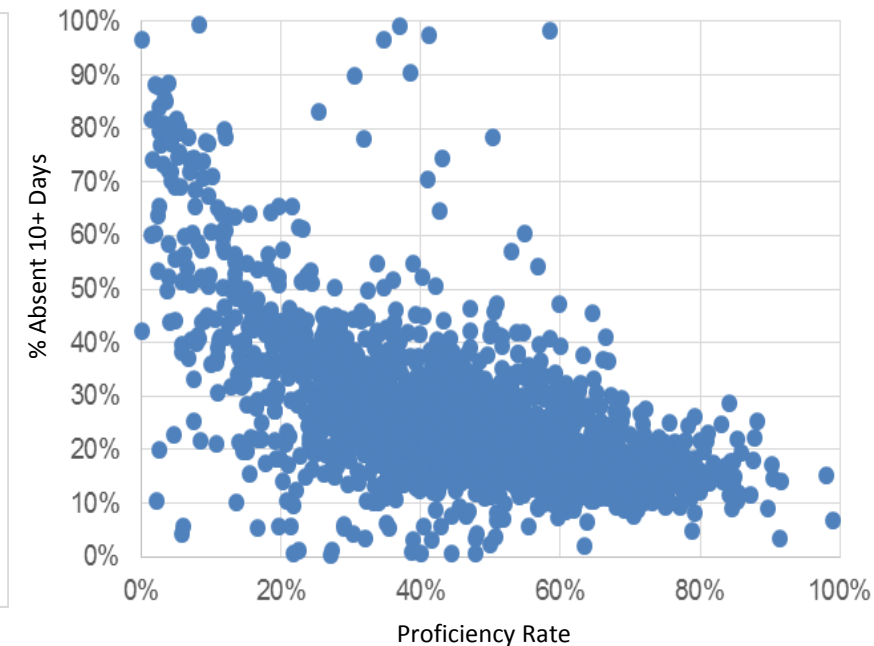
Chronic Absenteeism and Proficiency Rates – All Students
Elementary and Middle, FL



Chronic Absenteeism and Proficiency Rates – All Students
Elementary and Middle, MA



Chronic Absenteeism and Proficiency Rates – All Students
Elementary and Middle, MI



Source: Preliminary Ed Trust analysis of data from the FL, MA, and MI Departments of Education

The relationship between chronic absenteeism and proficiency is holds for groups of students, too.

Chronic Absenteeism and Proficiency Rates – Black Students,
Elementary and Middle, MI



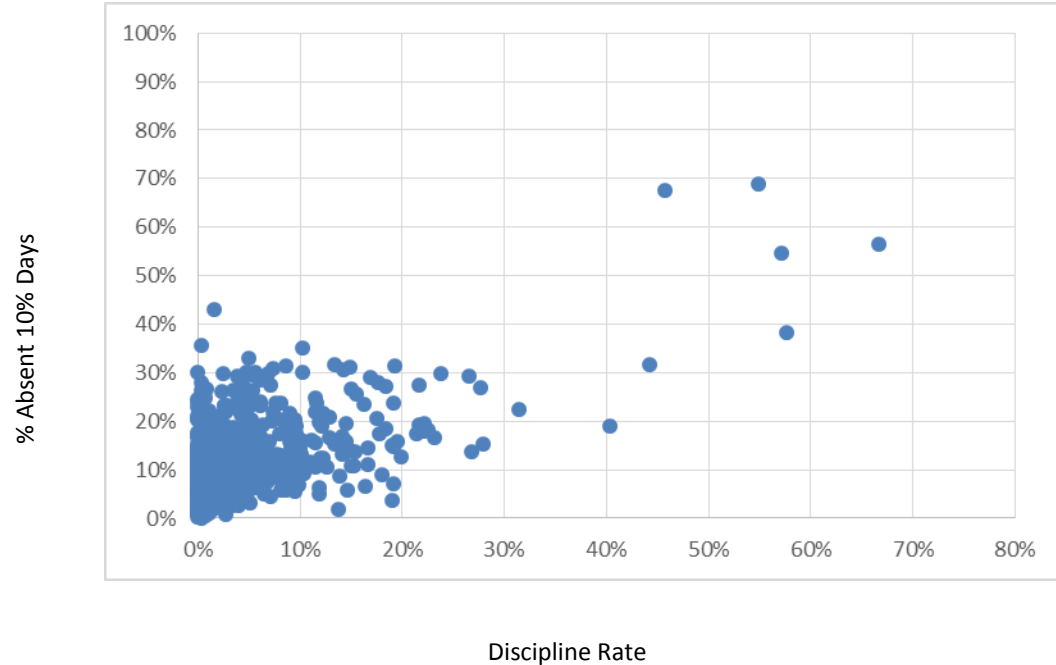
Chronic Absenteeism and Proficiency Rates –Students with
Disabilities, Elementary and Middle, MI



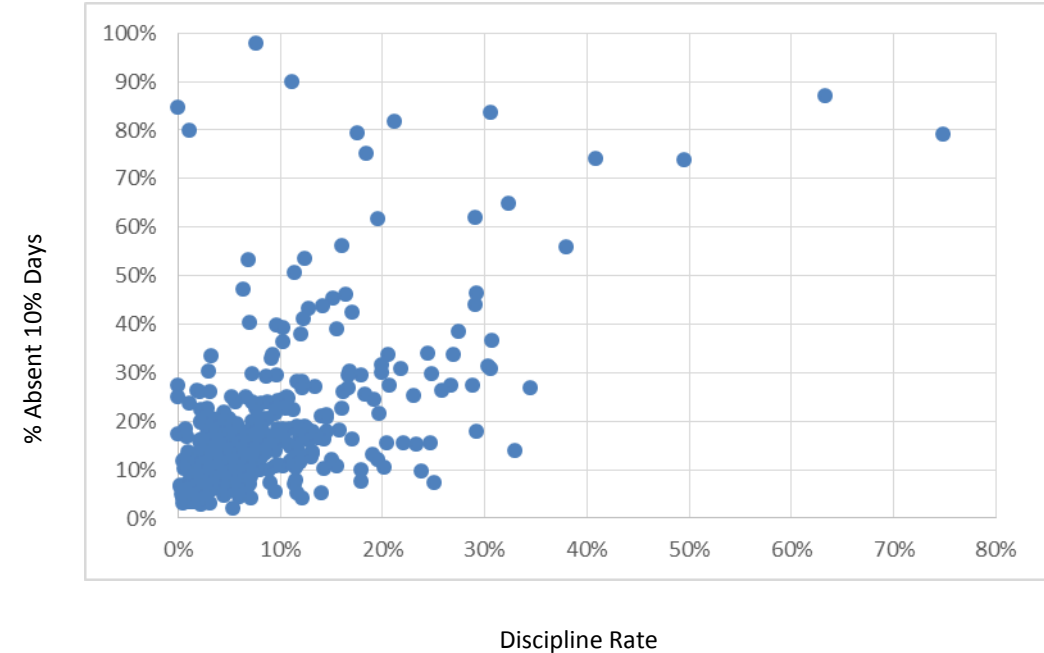
Source: Preliminary Ed Trust analysis of data from the MI Department of Education

In Massachusetts, the correlation between chronic absenteeism and discipline rates is strong, particularly at the elementary and middle school level.

Chronic Absenteeism and Discipline Rates – All Students, Elementary and Middle Schools, MA



Chronic Absenteeism and Discipline Rates – All Students, High Schools, MA



Source: Preliminary Ed Trust analysis of data from the MA Departments of Education

In Baltimore: Strong relationship between 6th grade absenteeism and high school graduation

| Days missed | Graduation Rate |
|-------------|-----------------|
| 0 to 10 | 70% |
| 11-19 | 51% |
| 20-39 | 36% |
| 40+ | 13% |

Huge difference in days missed between those schools with the lowest absenteeism rates and the highest

Table 5 – Florida 6th Grade Cohort-Cumulative Days Absent Over Seven Years of Middle and High School by Quintile

| | Mean Number of Days Absent | Means Days Absent Per Year |
|------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Top 20% | 13 | 3 |
| Upper Middle 20% | 35 | 6 |
| Middle 20% | 58 | 9 |
| Lower Middle 20% | 90 | 15 |
| Bottom 20% | 171 | 28 |

Source: Balfanz, R. and Byrnes, V., 2012, *The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools*

Implications for Accountability

Benefits

- Absenteeism has strong relationships with achievement and graduation rates. It matters for student success.
- The measure is relevant to all grades – including K-2.
- Absenteeism is something that schools/ districts don't always feel responsible for. Including the metric in accountability would send clear signal that they are responsible, and encourage early intervention.

Risks

- May be easily gameable.
- May provide schools with incentive to define “absence” as narrowly as possible.
- Including the measure could lead districts to pursue legal action against families whose students are missing a lot of school.

Considerations: Questions to Ask

- **How is “chronically” absent defined?**
 - Research suggests that missing 10 percent or more of school days can affect student outcomes. But defining “chronic” as a ***percentage*** of days missed as opposed to a ***number*** of days missed may lead to different definitions in different school districts.

Note: States have to report the percentage of students missing 15 or more days to the federal Civil Rights Data Collection. Under ESSA, this information must also be included on school report cards.

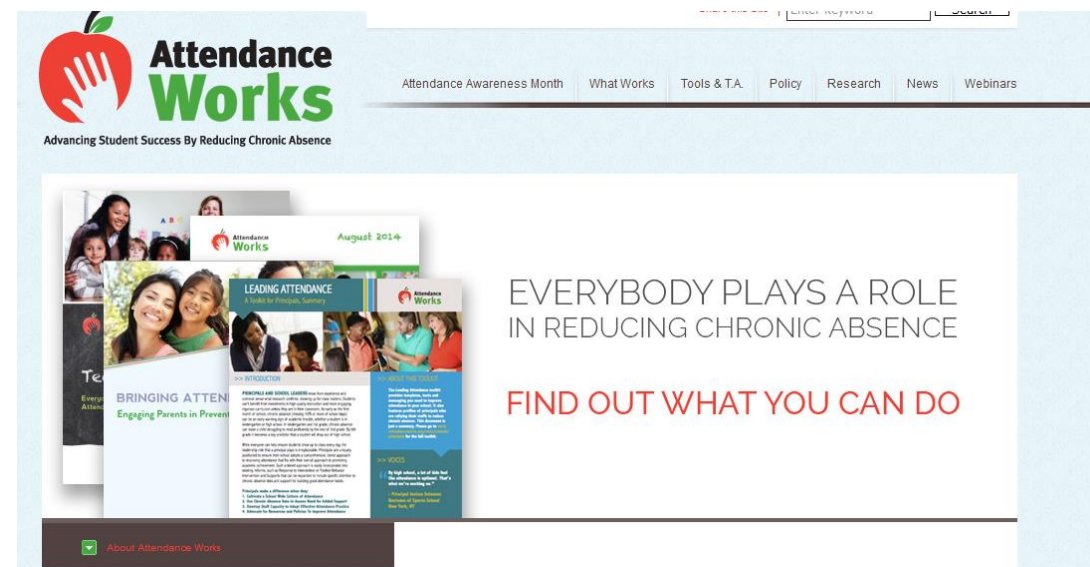
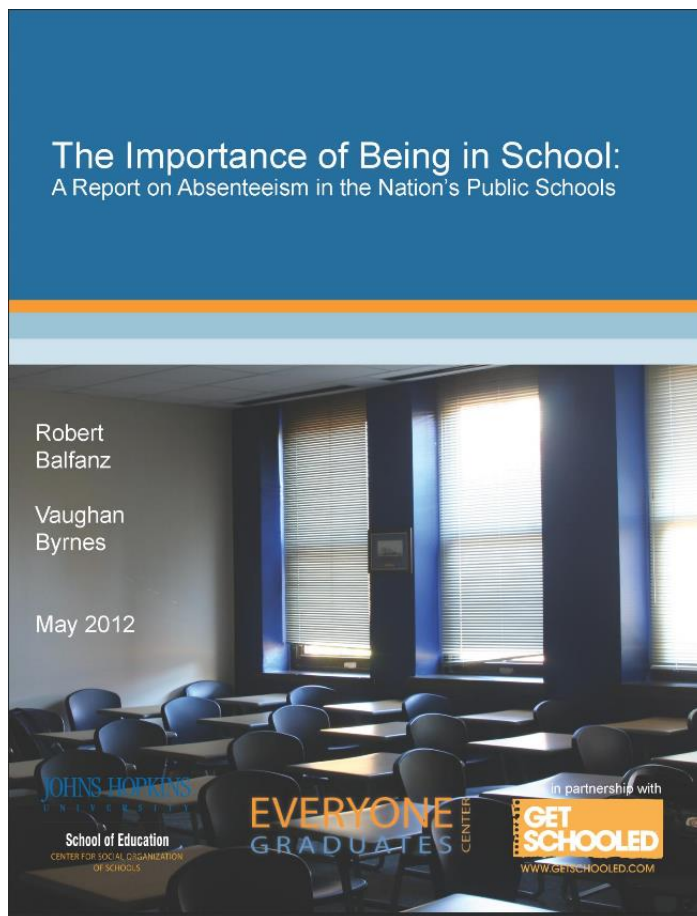
Considerations: Questions to Ask

- **What qualifies as an “absence”?**
 - Missing the whole day? Half a day? A class?
 - In high school, students may be missing individual classes, rather than entire days.
- **How are students who are suspended counted?**
 - Most states count out-of-school suspensions as an absence.
 - Most don't count in-school suspensions as an absence, even if the in-school suspension results in lost instructional time.
- **Are there exemptions in place for students absent for medical reasons?**

Considerations: Questions to Ask

- **What safeguards are in place to ensure data accuracy?**
 - Are schools tracking absences in-house, or are they entering this information into a district, or ideally, state, data system?
- What mechanism will the state use to audit the data to ensure accuracy?
 - Since chronic absenteeism is defined as a set number of days missed, there can be an incentive to stop reporting once students approach the threshold.

A couple of helpful resources...



Discussion