

WWC Review of the Report “Meeting the Challenge of Combating Chronic Absenteeism: Impact of the NYC Mayor’s Interagency Task Force on Chronic Absenteeism and School Attendance and Its Implications for Other Cities”^{1,2}

The findings from this review do not reflect the full body of research evidence on the *strategies developed by the New York City Mayor’s Interagency Task Force to combat chronic absenteeism*.

What is this study about?

The study examined the impact of the strategies developed by an interagency task force in New York City to combat chronic absenteeism in public schools. The strategies involved efforts both inside and outside of schools and aimed to improve coordination between city agencies and schools, offered a mentoring program for students (*Success Mentors*), and used data to identify and monitor chronically absent students, as well as students at risk of being chronically absent.

The strategies were implemented in 100 schools across three cohorts, starting in the 2010–11 school year. In the first year, 25 schools participated; another 25 schools began participating in the 2011–12 school year; and 50 more schools began participating in the 2012–13 school year. Forty-six comparison schools that did not receive the set of strategies were selected for the study sample. These schools were selected based on their similar chronic absenteeism rates, percentage of free and reduced-price lunch students, and percentage of English language learners. Collectively, the 146 study schools enrolled over 87,000 students in the 2012–13 school year.

Researchers assessed the impacts of the strategies after each year of participation in the interventions. Chronic absenteeism was compared for students in the 100 schools that received the strategies and

students in the 46 schools that did not receive them. Researchers also assessed the impact of the strategies among students who were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch and students who were in temporary shelters.

In addition, the study included an analysis of *Success Mentors* that compared students who participated in the *Success Mentors* program to students who did not.

Features of the Strategies Developed by the New York City Mayor’s Interagency Task Force to Combat Chronic Absenteeism

The strategies were developed by the Mayor’s office and New York City’s Department of Education but also involved Child Welfare Homeless Services, Youth Development, the Police Department, the Housing Authority, and the Department of Health. Strategies included efforts to:

- improve coordination between city agencies and schools,
- offer a mentoring program to students,
- use data to identify and monitor chronically absent students or students at risk of being chronically absent,
- use schools as centers for community and social service supports,
- offer incentives to encourage attendance, and
- increase awareness about chronic absenteeism through advertisements and other means.

What did the study find?

None of the analyses presented in this study meet WWC standards, and therefore, the study findings are not presented in this WWC report.

WWC Rating

The research described in this report does not meet WWC group design standards

All analyses reported in the study that assessed the impacts of the full set of strategies used to combat chronic absenteeism did not meet WWC requirements for baseline equivalence of the intervention and comparison groups. In all full-sample comparisons examined, the groups were not equivalent on either baseline chronic absenteeism rates or demographic characteristics. Consequently, the differences in outcomes for these groups cannot be attributed solely to the intervention. Therefore, the findings of this analysis are not presented in this WWC report.³

The analysis of *Success Mentors* compared students who participated in *Success Mentors* to students who did not. However, all students who participated in the program attended schools that received the full set of strategies used to combat chronic absenteeism, while students who did not participate in *Success Mentors* attended both schools that received the full set of strategies used to combat chronic absenteeism and schools that did not receive any strategies. Therefore, the study groups differed in whether they participated in *Success Mentors* and in the amount of chronic absenteeism strategies they employed. As a result, the differences in outcomes between the students who participated in *Success Mentors* and students who did not participate in *Success Mentors* in this analysis conflates the effect of the *Success Mentors* program with the effect of the broader set of strategies used to combat chronic absenteeism. Therefore, the findings are not presented in this WWC report.

Endnotes

¹ Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2013). *Meeting the challenge of combating chronic absenteeism: Impact of the NYC Mayor's Interagency Task Force on chronic absenteeism and school attendance and its implications for other cities*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University School of Education.

² Single study reviews examine evidence published in a study (supplemented, if necessary, by information obtained directly from the authors) to assess whether the study design meets WWC design standards. The review reports the WWC's assessment of whether the study meets WWC design standards and summarizes the study findings following WWC conventions for reporting evidence on effectiveness. This study was reviewed using the single study review protocol, version 2.0. A content expert additionally suggested that the Dropout Prevention Protocol, version 2.0, also be used to determine baseline equivalence. Version 2.0 of the Dropout Prevention Protocol requires that baseline equivalence be demonstrated on race/ethnicity, sex, at least one measure of degree of disadvantage, and one measure of school performance.

³ The WWC requested additional information from the authors about comparisons in the main analyses and in subgroups. This information suggested that certain subgroups within cohorts might have met baseline equivalence standards, but the WWC does not assign overall ratings for studies based on subgroup analyses.

Recommended Citation

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Glossary of Terms

Attrition	Attrition occurs when an outcome variable is not available for all participants initially assigned to the intervention and comparison groups. The WWC considers the total attrition rate and the difference in attrition rates across groups within a study.
Clustering adjustment	If intervention assignment is made at a cluster level and the analysis is conducted at the student level, the WWC will adjust the statistical significance to account for this mismatch, if necessary.
Confounding factor	A confounding factor is a component of a study that is completely aligned with one of the study conditions, making it impossible to separate how much of the observed effect was due to the intervention and how much was due to the factor.
Design	The design of a study is the method by which intervention and comparison groups were assigned.
Domain	A domain is a group of closely related outcomes.
Effect size	The effect size is a measure of the magnitude of an effect. The WWC uses a standardized measure to facilitate comparisons across studies and outcomes.
Eligibility	A study is eligible for review if it falls within the scope of the review protocol and uses either an experimental or matched comparison group design.
Equivalence	A demonstration that the analysis sample groups are similar on observed characteristics defined in the review area protocol.
Improvement index	Along a percentile distribution of students, the improvement index represents the gain or loss of the average student due to the intervention. As the average student starts at the 50th percentile, the measure ranges from -50 to +50.
Multiple comparison adjustment	When a study includes multiple outcomes or comparison groups, the WWC will adjust the statistical significance to account for the multiple comparisons, if necessary.
Quasi-experimental design (QED)	A quasi-experimental design (QED) is a research design in which subjects are assigned to intervention and comparison groups through a process that is not random.
Randomized controlled trial (RCT)	A randomized controlled trial (RCT) is an experiment in which investigators randomly assign eligible participants into intervention and comparison groups.
Single-case design (SCD)	A research approach in which an outcome variable is measured repeatedly within and across different conditions that are defined by the presence or absence of an intervention.
Standard deviation	The standard deviation of a measure shows how much variation exists across observations in the sample. A low standard deviation indicates that the observations in the sample tend to be very close to the mean; a high standard deviation indicates that the observations in the sample are spread out over a large range of values.
Statistical significance	Statistical significance is the probability that the difference between groups is a result of chance rather than a real difference between the groups. The WWC labels a finding statistically significant if the likelihood that the difference is due to chance is less than 5% ($p < .05$).
Substantively important	A substantively important finding is one that has an effect size of 0.25 or greater, regardless of statistical significance.

Please see the [WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook \(version 3.0\)](#) for additional details.