McREL INTERNATIONAL

NorthCentral Comprehensive Center

Nebraska • North Dakota • South Dakota • Wyoming

Strategies for Addressing Student and Teacher Absenteeism: A Literature Review

November 2016

Kevin C. Knoster, M.A.

This report was produced by the North Central Comprehensive Center (NCCC). Funded by the U.S. Department of Education and operated by McREL International (2012-2017), the NCCC serves state departments of education in Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming, helping to build capacity to effectively implement the goals of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position of the U.S. Department of Education and no official endorsement should be inferred.

Knoster, K. (2016). *Strategies for addressing student and teacher absenteeism: A literature review.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, North Central Comprehensive Center.

Additional review and guidance for this report was provided by McREL staff Kathleen Dempsey, Heather Hume, and Susan Shebby.

Table of Contents

Strategies for Addressing Student and Teacher Absenteeism: A Literature Review

Introduction

Students need to be in class to learn, and teachers need to be in class to teach. While this statement may appear obvious, it bears repeating given that over six million students in the United States (i.e., one in every eight) missed more than 15 days of school during the 2013–14 school year. Further, attendance data shows that 27.0% of teachers (i.e., one in every four) missed more than 10 days of school within the same year, with this percentage going as high as 49.0% and 75.0%, in Nevada and Hawaii, respectively (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

When students and teachers are absent from school, regardless of the reasons for these absences, it presents significant barriers to equitable and effective instruction, undermining stable learning environments and inhibiting student success—the implications of which can be profoundly detrimental and far-reaching. Research shows that children who are repeatedly absent from preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school classrooms, for example, are up to 25.9% less likely to reach a comparable reading level to their peers by 3rd grade and have a four times greater likelihood of ultimately dropping out of school. Studies also demonstrate that even just a single year of chronic absenteeism (i.e., missing more than 15 days of school) between grades 8 and 12 can increase the likelihood of a student dropping out seven-fold—which, in turn, has been found to be highly correlated with poverty, diminished health, and involvement in the criminal justice system in later life (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). These implications are exacerbated by high levels of teacher absenteeism, which has been found to further undermine student attendance and achievement while simultaneously damaging school reputations in surrounding communities and leading to broader economic challenges (Harris van Keuren, 2009).

Given the severity of these outcomes, the purpose of this literature review is to inform perspectives concerning chronic absenteeism amongst students and teachers, as well as to summarize information on potentially effective strategies to mitigate absenteeism that may be used by state (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs). The North Central Comprehensive Center team at McREL International conducted an analysis of current literature regarding student and teacher absenteeism in order to better conceptualize the problem and highlight successful steps that can be taken to address it. Drawing upon theoretically conceptualized and practically applied strategies for resolving absenteeism and truancy, we put forward a series of best practices and recommendations for professional educators and administrators struggling to overcome the persistent challenge of chronic absenteeism.

> Just a single year of chronic absenteeism…between grades 8 and 12 can increase the likelihood of a student dropping out seven-fold.

Methodology

Several procedures were used to ensure a high-quality review of literature on teacher and student absenteeism. First, a comprehensive search of journals and reports was conducted based upon a wide variety of key terms including but not limited to: "absenteeism," "chronic absenteeism," "teacher absenteeism," "truancy," "teacher truancy," "Native American absenteeism," "Native American truancy," "Native American engagement," "teacher engagement," "teacher absence," and "student

absence." Four databases were used, EBSCOhost, ERIC, Proquest, and Google Scholar. Second, the reference section of each article found was searched in order to find additional articles. Third, to eliminate redundancy, only relevant articles applicable to the purpose of this literature review (i.e., informing a discussion of strategies and best practices for addressing chronic absenteeism) were admitted as final resources; all articles falling beyond these parameters were omitted. In total, 63 resources are included in this report.

Findings: Student Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism specifically refers to instances of prolonged or repeated absence wherein students miss at least 15 days of a school year for any reason, regardless of whether these reasons are excused or unexcused (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This is an important distinction to make in appropriately conceptualizing absenteeism, as absenteeism is different from daily attendance—the statistics of which schools are required to catalogue and report as a means of state and federal accountability. A school, for example, can report an average daily attendance rate of 90.0% and still ultimately have as much as 40.0% of its student population chronically absent as a result of different students being absent on different days. As such, insufficient or limited data can often result in instances of chronic absenteeism going unidentified, resulting in inadequate supports for the students who need them most (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Adams, 2016).

Absenteeism correlates with a number of sociological and academic factors. Research has shown higher rates of absenteeism with a spectrum of predictors, including behavioral issues, psychological issues, family background, peer issues, and a lack of motivation or interest in schoolwork (Bimler & Kirkland, 2001). Data from 2013–14, for instance, indicates that students with disabilities are 34.0% more likely to be chronically absent than their peers, while English Learner (EL) students are 22.0% more likely (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Absenteeism has also been found to occur more frequently and repeatedly among students from families with lower levels of income (Romero & Lee, 2007) or from specific cultural backgrounds—particularly among students identifying as either Native American or Pacific Islander, who are more than 50.0% more likely to engage in chronic absenteeism than their white classmates (Romero & Lee, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In 2013, the states of New Mexico, Montana, Arizona,

Insufficient or limited data can often result in instances of chronic absenteeism going unidentified, resulting in inadequate supports for the students who need them most.

Oklahoma, Oregon, and Wyoming, which all have large Native American student populations, reported some of the highest absenteeism rates in the country, with as much as 25.0% of student populations at specific grade levels missing three or more days of school within a single month (Ginsburg, Jordan, & Chang, 2014). Further, studies suggest that absenteeism is self-perpetuating: Students who are chronically absent at earlier ages demonstrate a significantly greater likelihood of recurring nonattendance throughout school (Romero & Lee, 2007), with chronic absenteeism becoming most prevalent among high school students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Educators have used a variety of approaches to address student absenteeism, including the implementation of state and/or federal initiatives designed to ensure regular attendance (e.g., the My Brother's Keeper [MBK] Success Mentors Initiative) as well as strategies developed through trial-and-error by independent educators and school administrators. Potential solutions to the challenge of chronic student absenteeism appear to include a number of consistent themes:

- The effective use of data to identify, monitor, and support the attendance and performance of students at risk of absenteeism
- Family and community engagement
- The provision of wrap-around services for students facing obstacles to consistent attendance that are outside of school
- The implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) supports

Following is information related to each of these themes and specific examples of their success in reducing student absenteeism.

Data-Driven Action

The most prevalent and recurring theme across measures is the effective use of data to identify, monitor, and support students who struggle to regularly attend school. Through the federal Every Student, Every Day initiative, the U.S. Departments of Justice, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Education produced *A Community Toolkit to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism* to recommend a series of action items—the first of which is to generate and act upon absenteeism data. Specifically, the toolkit advocates for the development of early warning and intervention systems that identify students at risk of falling into patterns of chronic absenteeism, as well as the sharing of such data between school districts and organizational affiliates to "ensure coordinated systems of support for students who are chronically absent" (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. VI).

As is the case with any system for capturing and using data, attendance tracking activities must be consistent and standardized to ensure accuracy and congruency. Longitudinal data (i.e., data collected over time) can inform absenteeism trends, both for individual students and students in aggregate, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of the barriers to routine student attendance and the identification of students in need of support. Data pertaining to frequency and duration of student tardiness, early school departures, classes missed, time spent away from the classroom, visits to the office, and requests to leave the classroom can inform considerations of which students in a school are at risk of falling into patterns of absenteeism (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). Some school districts already use data systems which collect this information and, when leveraged to examine individual attendance patterns, can provide staff with a more comprehensive understanding of absenteeism trends. Additionally, reports providing information related to student absence data should be made publicly available, disaggregated by grade, school, or other indicators of interest, to ensure that students' families and communities as a whole are made aware of the degree to which absenteeism is

occurring (Ginsburg, Jordan, & Chang, 2014).

Effective use of data also necessitates appropriate follow-up with students identified by data collection systems. Interventions with students identified as at risk of or already engaging in absenteeism should include a collaborative approach that incorporates the student, school staff, and family members. Research suggests that interventions may be most effective when implemented in multiple "tiers":

- Promoting consistent and regular attendance for all students at Tier 1 (e.g., explicitly teaching school rules, displaying attendance data, encouraging parents and students to track attendance)
- Identifying and initiating individualized interventions with students at risk of falling into patterns of chronic absenteeism at Tier 2 (e.g., establishing routines where a student must check in or check out with an adult at the start and end of each day, assigning student/peer mentors/buddies, providing more routine attendance reports to a student's parents)
- Conducting comprehensive and intense interventions for students engaging in chronic absenteeism at Tier 3 (e.g., functional behavioral assessments, ongoing consultations with physicians, mental health professionals, family members, court officials if appropriate) (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014)

Such rigorous reporting, tracking, and follow up on student attendance data not only reduces the likelihood of chronic absenteeism but also mitigates the risk of student dropout. The implementation and enforcement of consistent and comprehensive truancy tracking policy and procedures, as well as appropriate follow up with at-risk students, significantly improves the quality of data reported and actions taken upon those data, as well as ultimately inhibiting student absenteeism and dropouts (De Witte & Csillag, 2014).

Researchers evaluating a warning system for absenteeism in a New Jersey school district shows the importance and benefits of collecting comprehensive student data. When administrators and principals recognized their existing systems for tracking student attendance and performance were insufficient in addressing persistent struggles with student absenteeism, they came together to brainstorm how to collect more nuanced data in order to explore possible solutions. They collected and analyzed a variety of data on their 2008–2009 freshman class, including their attendance records from grades 6, 7, and 8, as well as their math and language skill scores from grades 6 and 7. Specifically, they used days enrolled and days absent to calculate percent absences, with students missing more than 10.0% of class time or enrolled for a period of 45 days or less (25.0% of the school year) being identified as at risk. Referring to academic performance data, they also used the 25th percentile in each content area (e.g., math and language arts) as criterion for identifying at-risk students. Researchers found that incorporating additional indicators to inform student attendance data allowed for a more robust identification of students who were truly at risk of falling into patterns of chronic absenteeism, as well as which students were currently engaged in such patterns. The ability to reliably and accurately identify students in need of attendance-based interventions is the basis of any effective measures to curb student absenteeism. Put simply, one cannot support consistently absent students when it is unknown which students are consistently absent (Genao, 2015).

Incorporating additional indicators to inform student attendance data allowed for a more robust identification of students who were truly at risk of falling into patterns of chronic absenteeism.

Key Takeaways:

- Capitalize on available student data and implement new data collection measures if necessary, to recognize warning signs of chronic absenteeism.
- Ensure that data collection and analysis procedures are congruent and standardized to ensure consistent and accurate interpretation.
- Share attendance and absenteeism data with colleagues, families, and communities as appropriate to facilitate additional supports for absent students.
- Act collaboratively on data when warning signs of absenteeism are recognized, involving students, school staff, and family.
- Promote attendance among all students in addition to supporting their at-risk peers.

Family, Community, and Cultural Engagement

Another consistent theme across many absenteeism strategies is the engagement of family and community members in supporting students in regularly attending class. This is also a specifically referenced action item in the U.S. Department of Education recommendations, which encourage the launch of local initiatives and events to raise public awareness regarding the underlying causes and harmful effects of chronic absenteeism, particularly among families and youth (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). A 2016 study soliciting input from students with a history of truancy revealed that, traditionally, many students' parents have not been informed of attendance concerns related to their children (Gase, DeFosset, Perry, & Kuo). In contrast, students who described their families as highly involved in monitoring their attendance tended to be absent less often. Many of these students acknowledged the powerful effect that their families can have in influencing attendance, but also reported that they often lack the necessary resources to do so due to their lack of knowledge about attendance concerns, low level of educational attainment, limited proficiency in English, and/or immigrant status (Gase et al., 2016). This corroborates data that suggest the ability of schools to address chronic absenteeism is significantly related to the degree to which those schools communicate with the families of absent students (Epstein, 1995; Roderick et al., 1997; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). This is particularly true in cases where schools are able to overcome language barriers to communicate with the families of EL students, resulting in significant attendance gains (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

An exemplar of the power of effective communication and engagement with families and communities can be seen in Mitchell School District, South Dakota, where a number of measures put in place by the district has led to a daily attendance rate of more than 90.0% for elementary school, middle school, and high school students. Following Governor Dennis Daugaard's declaration of September as "Attendance Awareness Month," parents in Mitchell School District took on a more active role in ensuring their children were attending school. The district reaches out to and engages

A 2016 study soliciting input from students with a history of truancy revealed that, traditionally, many students' parents have not been informed of attendance concerns related to their children. In contrast, students who described their families as highly involved in monitoring their attendance tended to be absent less often.

parents of students who miss five days of class in a given semester, and files a truancy petition with the state attorney if a student is absent 10 days. School staff remain in frequent contact with parents, proactively identifying and mitigating concerns before they begin affecting student performance (Bertsch, 2016).

Another model of effective community engagement can be seen in efforts implemented by the Los Angeles Unified School District's Dropout Prevention and Recovery (DPR) program. The DPR program developed and implemented a campaign called "My Future, My Decision," which integrates 21st century social networking and communication tools to engage families and community members in supporting student attendance. Specifically, the program uses student performance metrics such as attendance and grade point average to identify students who may be at risk, and then contacts those students and their families through frequently used mediums like text messaging, Facebook, or YouTube. The program also provides a parent-student handbook that outlines resources available to students who earn diplomas and recruits former students to serve as "ambassadors" who spread awareness of the importance of regular attendance and help with social media outreach. The Los Angeles Unified School District credited the DPR program for making progress toward its attendance goals, praising its fluidity and pervasiveness (Libby, 2007).

A key aspect of effective community engagement, particularly with Native American populations, is the alignment of curriculum with culture. Research has shown that members of Native American communities often perceive education systems as disconnected from their unique cultural priorities and perspectives, which fosters disenfranchisement and disengagement. In order to engage these communities, instructional practices, curriculum content, and school climate should be infused with culturally relevant practices (Oakes & Maday, 2009). Given the variety of Native American experiences, expressions, and lifestyles, this means educators and school administrators must focus on the unique culture of their local communities rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. While doing so is an intensive process, it can yield a more relevant and applicable learning experience for students, increasing their engagement and performance outcomes (Kellogg et al., 2016). Specifically, educators should offer relevant, real-world, and experiential opportunities for learning aligning with students' educational goals; adapt school schedules to align with students' schedules and responsibilities outside of school; focus on developing students' sense of membership in their schools and communities; and facilitate personal relationships between Native American students and school staff (National Indian Education Association, 2002; Smagorinsky, Anglin, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2012; Wilcox, 2015; Kellogg et al., 2016). Not surprisingly, such efforts are most effective when they involve parent-teacher partnerships, which helps align academic and family life and leads to positive changes in attitudes toward school, student self-perceptions, and greater levels of engagement and comfort among Native American students with their schools (Ngai & Koehn, 2016).

Key Takeaways:

- Engage families and community members to provide additional supports for student attendance outside of school.
- Ensure that families are aware of available resources to support their children's regular attendance and identify barriers to their participation in supporting attendance.
- Take action to inform community members and spread awareness of chronic absenteeism, considering alternative channels of communication that may prove most effective for reaching out to local stakeholders.
- Incorporate education as a component of culture, reaching out to communities and engaging them in aligning academic and family life.

Wrap-Around Services

Many educators and school administrators have also implemented strategies which focus on removing barriers to student attendance by employing "wrap-around" student support services. These services provide on-site supports to students that would otherwise require absence from class to obtain, such as physical health care, mental health care, dental care, enrichment or developmental classes, afterschool or summer programs, and mentorship programs. By providing students with broader access to such resources in school, research suggests that educators can improve students' attendance and overall academic performance (National Education Association, 2013). Additionally, effective delivery of comprehensive wrap-around services can create much-needed stability in the lives of struggling students, facilitating re-engagement with educational goals (Fries, Carney, Blackman-Urteaga, & Savas, 2012). Providing school counseling services, for example, has been found to positively correlate with a number of student outcomes, such as improved attendance, decreased discipline and suspension rates, and enhanced student achievement on state standardized assessments (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012).

Wrap-around services can be provided in various ways. In Memphis, Tennessee, for example, community leaders and school administrators have taken steps to address health disparities among their student population by implementing a plan to staff a nurse in every school in Shelby County. School data suggests inadequate staffing of medical professionals leads to 18.0% of students missing at least 18 days of class due to health-related concerns. By providing access to quality healthcare on-site, Shelby County Schools intends to reduce these numbers and ensure that students can receive the medical supports they need without missing such substantial portions of the school year (Bauman, 2016).

Similarly, the national No Kid Hungry campaign addresses chronic absenteeism facilitated by economic (specifically food-related) disparities by focusing on helping schools expand their school breakfast programs. Campaign reports show the benefits of these efforts—students enrolled at participating schools in Maryland, for example, are attending classes 2.9% to 7.2% more frequently and scoring 17.5% higher on standardized math assessments (American Teacher, 2013; Augustine-Thottungal, Kern, Key, & Sherman, 2013). At Gibson Elementary School in St. Louis, Missouri, educators partnered with Whirlpool Corporation to install washer and dryer units on-site to provide low-income students and their families with a means to clean their laundry. In response, over 90.0% of tracked students showed increased attendance rates, with 95.0% of teachers indicating that their students appeared more motivated in class and more willing to participate in extra-curricular activities (Kirk, 2016).

Key Takeaways:

- Absenteeism is a symptom, not a cause—explore the unique, underlying reasons for absenteeism and consider alternative approaches to address them.
- Support student needs beyond academics to encourage attendance and participation.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Schools have seen a dramatic rise in interest in social emotional learning (SEL), with advocates suggesting it could contribute to increased student achievement while mitigating negative student outcomes, such as chronic absenteeism (Oberle, Domitrovich, Meyers & Weissberg, 2016). SEL approaches provide opportunities for students to learn, develop, and practice the social-emotional skills and competencies necessary to succeed in life, such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making skills (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg & Walberg, 2007; Oberle et al., 2016). Specifically, these skills help students recognize and appropriately manage emotions, develop healthy relationships with peers and adults, establish

positive and realistic goals, fulfill personal and social needs and responsibilities, and make ethical choices (Zins et al., 2007). Studies show that SEL implementation is most effective when schools establish systemic approaches to student supports, discipline, prevention, and academics through the lens of SEL—creating positive, schoolwide learning conditions that facilitate affective and cognitive learning and bolster student motivation (Dusenbury, Weissberg, & Meyers, 2016).

Research suggests that teachers can incorporate SEL in their classrooms through a number of methods, such as developing "free-standing," step-by-step lessons that teach social and emotional skills; employing strategies to facilitate positive and supportive classroom environments; and engaging in instruction or general teaching practices which integrate SEL with the curriculum (e.g., prompting students to use academic material covered in a lesson to respond to a decision-making query). Principals and school administrators can support these efforts by communicating the importance of SEL to school staff; assessing the extent to which gaps in SEL skills exist; facilitating opportunities for teachers to participate in SEL professional development and coaching; fostering partnerships and collaborating with community members and families; and taking steps to create and nurture a school climate that supports SEL (Dusenbury, Weissberg, & Meyers, 2016). Educational psychologists and other support staff can also play an important role in the implementation of SEL, as these personnel are uniquely equipped with the capacity to operate at a multi-agency level—engaging students, parents, schools, and districts as a whole to identify and reach out to students at risk of falling into patterns of chronic absenteeism, ensuring that they receive the necessary social and emotional supports (Carroll, 2015).

Research shows that SEL-oriented activities and programs reduce absenteeism and lead to other positive student outcomes, such as increased educational expectations, a more positive attitude toward learning, and increased engagement (Marvul, 2012). In South Carolina, for instance, the WINGS for Kids program has had a particularly positive impact on student absenteeism and behavior in Charleston and Lake City schools. Participating students meet five days a week for three hours a day to work on projects that help achieve social and emotional health-oriented learning objectives. Data indicates that only 4.0% of participants in the WINGS for Kids program were chronically absent during the 2015–16 school year, compared to 12.0% of students who were not enrolled in the program (Hinton, 2016). Similarly, Visitacion Valley Middle School in San Francisco, California, has made strides in addressing chronic absenteeism through the implementation of "Quiet Time," which gives students the opportunity to participate in two 15-minute periods of meditation per day. In addition to reducing truancy rates by more than half to 7.0%, Quiet Time has also resulted in significant decreases in suspension rates—from 13.0% to 6.0%—as well as increases in the faculty retention rate (Edutopia, 2012).

Key Takeaways:

- Incorporate learning which goes beyond the academic, facilitating SEL opportunities to help students develop as individuals.
- Apply knowledge of curriculum to knowledge of self, providing opportunities for students to apply what they have learned through decisions and action.
- Attend to students' social and emotional needs to create positive learning environments in which they will want to be present.

Game-Based Learning

Theory and application suggest that the implementation of game-based learning may also be a viable strategy for mitigating rates of chronic absenteeism. By applying "gamification" to curriculum (i.e., applying elements of gaming and gameplay such as point-scoring, competition, and rules of play), educators can facilitate higher levels of student engagement and foster greater motivation

to regularly attend and participate in class (Perrotta, Featherstone, Aston & Houghton, 2013). Infusing education with elements of gameplay increases student curiosity through establishing goals and making learning fun, alleviating the burnout and/or boredom experienced by some students in response to traditional teaching approaches (Papastergiou, 2009). In turn, the incorporation of gaming components can promote greater affect for learning in general, improving students' self-confidence and self-perceptions of academic ability (Miller & Robertson, 2011), in addition to characterizing the act of learning as a dynamic, engaging, and enjoyable experience (Fengfeng, 2008).

> ...By applying "gamification" to curriculum (i.e., applying elements of gaming and gameplay such as point-scoring, competition, and rules of play), educators can facilitate higher levels of student engagement and foster greater motivation to regularly attend and participate in class.

As a graduate student at the University of Alaska Southeast, elementary teacher Cindy Duncan conducted a study in which she hypothesized that the implementation of game-based learning would result in positive changes in attendance behavior. (Duncan, 2015). She then incorporated the videogame Minecraft into her own instructional routines, permitting her students to play Minecraft for a 30-minute period at the beginning of the school day, which she dubbed "Morning Craft." She also made it a classroom policy that students arriving late to school would miss part, if not all, of their game time. Morning Craft was not held every day, which incorporated a degree of unpredictability in order to encourage students to arrive on time every day. Corroborating the hypothesis of her research study, Duncan found that Morning Craft resulted in improved attendance as well as increased engagement and participation in class (Duncan, 2016).

Key Takeaways:

- Take steps to add variety and enjoyment to instruction by incorporating elements of gameplay such as point scoring, competition, and rules of play.
- Use games and activities which students enjoy as catalysts to encourage attendance. If students enjoy learning, they will want to participate.

Findings: Teacher Absenteeism

Employee absence can arise in any organization or institution and takes one of three forms: *turnover*, when employees leave to do the same job for an alternative employer; *attrition*, when an employee leaves a particular field altogether; and *absenteeism*, when employees retain their job at their current organization but are routinely absent for any reason (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008; Hanover Research, 2012).

In education, teacher turnover, attrition, and absenteeism place burdens on schools, undermining the ability of education agencies to provide quality and consistent instruction to students (Green, 2014). Absenteeism, in particular, poses a significant obstacle to positive student outcomes and achievement, creating instability which can permeate entire school systems (Harris van Keuren, 2009). Specifically, higher rates of teacher absenteeism are correlated with inhibited student academic performance (Lee, Goodman, Dandapani & Kekahio, 2015) and decreased rates of student attendance (Black, Seder, & Kekahio, 2014). In addition, it creates barriers to effective use of school resources and administrative time due to subsequent action to address teacher absences (Obeng-Denteh, Yeboah, Sam, & Monkah, 2011).

A number of factors appear to influence the extent to which teachers are absent from class. Research

suggests that pay structure, working conditions and climate, community conditions, and cultural responsibilities all have some bearing upon the frequency and severity of poor teacher attendance (Lee, Goodman, Dandapani, & Kekahio, 2015),

Higher rates of teacher absenteeism are correlated with inhibited student academic performance and decreased rates of student attendance.

as do physical and mental health concerns, stress, and perceptions of self-efficacy (Green, 2014). Management and administration can also play a significant role in contributing to teacher absenteeism, both in terms of the types of relationships between teachers and administration (Lee, Goodman, Dandapani & Kekahio, 2015) and school- or district-initiated activities that remove teachers from their classrooms (e.g., professional conferences, meetings, workshops, etc.) (Pitkoff, 2003; Hanover Research, 2012). Prevalent among strategies employed to address teacher absenteeism are components specifically geared toward mitigating these influences, particularly through the provision of positive incentives and rewards for teachers who are regularly in attendance; the revision or development of school and/or district policies to facilitate more regular attendance; and actions undertaken to create school environments and climates more conducive to regular attendance (e.g., reducing teacher stress, updating physical infrastructure, addressing health concerns, etc.).

Incentives

One of the most frequently recurring themes among strategies implemented to combat teacher absenteeism is a focus on providing teachers with greater incentives to be in regular attendance. While education agency administrators may be hesitant to provide incentives due to budgetary restrictions, making such investments early on can offset long-term and often greater costs (Jacobs & Kritsonis, 2007). For example, the Aldine Independent School District in Harris County, Texas, saved approximately $284,000 and doubled its number of teachers with perfect attendance in a single year by offering matching contributions to teachers' 401(a) retirement accounts in exchange for good attendance, as well as increasing the size of these contributions for teachers with exemplary attendance. Educators with perfect attendance records were also honored at a celebration held by the district, wherein teachers were eligible to win substantial prizes (e.g., a new car) (District Management Council, 2004).

Research suggests that the ways in which incentives are implemented may play as important a role in mitigating the frequency of teacher absences as incentives themselves. Administrators should, for example, make rewards readily attainable for instructors who are routinely present without making rewards so easily obtained that they are effectively a "guarantee." Studies show that, though all teachers respond to incentives to some degree, teachers are less likely to put forth substantial effort when the probability of rewards is extremely high (i.e., a guarantee requiring minimal effort to obtain) or extremely low (i.e., so difficult to obtain that even substantial effort may not be enough secure rewards) (Ahn, 2008). Finding a balance between these two extremes appears to be critical in incentivizing teacher attendance, empowering educators who abstain from absenteeism without disenfranchising them by rewarding less-proactive colleagues.

One means of achieving this balance is through offering rewards proportionate to the degree to which teachers are present. Teachers exert greater effort when the amount and degree of rewards available to them is contingent upon the degree to which they perform and succeed. According to a Rice University study, educator award programs which use proportional rewards systems, such as the ASPIRE teacher award program in the Houston Independent School District, can achieve substantial positive outcomes across three levels: individual performance, teacher group performance, and school-wide group performance. Teachers are rewarded based primarily on value-added scores determined by student improvements on standardized tests, as well as on school ratings from the Texas Education Agency, student enrollment, and general classroom performance in mathematics, reading, science, language arts, and social studies. The implementation of such incentive programs has specifically been found to yield improvements in teacher attendance as high as 20.0% and, subsequently, higher student performance scores (Houston Education Research Consortium, 2013; McCaig, 2013).

Key Takeaways:

- Acknowledge and reward teachers who are regularly in attendance, demonstrating that their time and efforts are valued.
- Distribute rewards in proportion to performance, providing the most substantial rewards to educators with exemplary attendance.

Policy

Another area of emphasis in addressing teacher absenteeism is a reevaluation of school and district procedures and policies related to teacher attendance. Studies suggests that a number of modifications can yield significant effects on the frequency of teacher absences, ranging from slight changes to specific practices to larger, systemic adjustments. Recommendations supported by research include (1) more substantial, formative, and formal reporting of teacher absence data, (2) requiring teachers to report absences directly to supervisors in face-to-face, in-person meetings, (3) more consistent, proactive, and clear communication with staff concerning expectations for teacher attendance, (4) the implementation of measures by district administration to hold school administration accountable for teacher absences, (5) encouraging and promoting good health among teachers as a matter of policy, (6) allowing teachers to carry over unused sick days as a means of eliminating a "use it or lose it" mentality, (7) eliminating leave banks, and (8) placing restrictions on the use of personal days to ensure that teachers are not using them at the expense of student learning (e.g., not using vacation leave time while school is in session).

It may also be prudent for administrators at the school, district, and/or state level alike to reconsider policies and procedures regarding "sponsored" leave, providing opportunities for teachers to participate in professional conferences, meetings, or workshops only during times which do not interfere with their classes (Pitkoff, 2003; Hanover Research, 2012).

Examples of more substantial modifications to policy which have proved beneficial are highlighted in a 2007 research report examining the implementation of four-day school weeks across rural school districts in Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, Louisiana, New Mexico, Idaho, and Nebraska (Beesley & Anderson, 2007). In each case, attendance rates for students and teachers alike were found to have increased following the transition to four-day school weeks, ranging from 2.0% to 5.8% increases in student attendance and from 2.0% to 50.0% in teacher attendance. Four-day school weeks, research suggests, provide students and teachers with opportunities to attend appointments or address personal affairs during the additional day off, facilitating less scheduling conflicts (Dam, 2006; Beesley & Anderson, 2007). Clearly, however, it is essential to engage in clear communication with any and all stakeholders when implementing such a substantial modification to the educational system, facilitating collaboration from school staff, students, families, and communities at large (Beesley & Anderson, 2007).

Key Takeaways:

- Reevaluate policies and procedures and consider whether or not they mitigate or contribute to teacher absenteeism.
- Consider both small adjustments and larger modifications to policy as appropriate, but include stakeholders in decision-making processes.

Work Environment, Stress, and Health

Strategies to reduce teacher absenteeism also often promote a work and school environment that is conducive to teacher attendance (i.e., an environment where teachers will want to be present, are comfortable, and will have fewer reasons to leave). This can take many forms, such as investments in physical and material infrastructure (e.g., renovating classrooms, providing instructional technology) and teacher well-being (e.g., stress-reduction activities, promoting good physical health), as well as adjustments in the leadership style and practices of school and district administrators. In particular, research suggests that simply feeling supported by one's supervisor/administrator can play a dramatic role in shaping one's satisfaction with their work environment, which significantly affects the extent to which an employee will be in attendance. Studies also suggest that positive relationships among teachers and school staff, particularly school leadership, can play a profound role in characterizing perceptions of workplace environments and, in turn, influencing teachers' decisions to attend school each day (Owen, 2010; Harrison, Labby, & Sullivan, 2015).

Research suggests that simply feeling supported by one's supervisor/administrator can play a dramatic role in shaping one's satisfaction with their work environment, which significantly affects the extent to which an employee will be in attendance.

Research suggests that improving workplace environments through investing in teachers' well-being can have substantial pay-offs in reducing their time out of the classroom. While this can be accomplished by providing material infrastructure, such as classroom amplification systems to reduce teacher voice strain. (Fickes, 2011), investments in stress-reduction activities have been found to be particularly promising—alleviating teacher anxiety and promoting an overall healthier and more positive work environment (Gold et al., 2009; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013). In general, teachers appear receptive to opportunities to participate in such activities and typically characterize the experiences as beneficial. Mindfulness training and meditation, for example,

have been highly correlated with decreases in teacher stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression, as well as with increases in perceptions of positive interactions with coworkers, working in an emotionally supportive environment, and sensations of occupational self-compassion (i.e., feeling valued) (Roeser et al., 2013). Mental and emotional health, in turn, have been linked with better physical health, specifically lowering blood pressure and resting heart rate while reducing cortisol levels, bearing potential implications for the amount of time that teachers spend out of school due to illness or medical concerns (Carmody & Baer, 2008; Gold et al., 2009; Roeser et al., 2013).

Key Takeaways:

- Attend to teacher absenteeism by investing in educators' physical and emotional well-being.
- Encourage positive and professional relationships among school staff and ensure that teachers feel supported by school leadership.
- Educating children is an intensive process—take steps to reduce teachers' stress and anxiety and let them know that they are valued.

Conclusion

Absenteeism is a significant obstacle to effective and equitable learning, giving rise to instructional instability that can be detrimental to student outcomes in the classroom and beyond. Many factors influence the pervasiveness of absenteeism for students and teachers alike, and understanding these factors is essential in developing strategies to support regular attendance. While a degree of variety exists across approaches to addressing *student* absenteeism—such as effectively using data; engaging with families, communities, and cultures; providing wrap-around services and supports; and promoting SEL and game-based learning—fewer themes are apparent in existing literature which pertain to addressing *teacher* absenteeism (e.g., providing incentives for regular attendance, revising absenteeism-conducive policies, and promoting positive work environment). Future research should specifically focus on developing new strategies to ensure that teachers, in particular, are regularly in attendance, especially in scenarios involving student populations which appear to be at greater risk of succumbing to the harmful effects of absenteeism (e.g., low-income, Native American, and/or Pacific Islander students). When working with such groups, a key consideration in the adoption and implementation of strategies should include the specific and unique cultural backgrounds of stakeholders. Parties seeking to address student and/or teacher absenteeism should also review and draw upon aspects of multiple strategies as a means providing supports which are comprehensive, relevant, and ultimately effective. ■

References

Adams, J. (2016). California attorney general calls for state actions to improve student attendance. *EdSource*. Retrieved from https://edsource.org/2016/california-attorney-general-calls-for-state-actions-to-improve-student-attendance/570932

Ahn, T. (2008). The missing link: Estimating the impact of incentives on effort and effort on production using teacher accountability legislation. Retrieved from http://public.econ.duke.edu/~psarcidi/TomAhn-JobMarketPaper.pdf

Augustine-Thottungal, R., Kern, J., Key, J., & Sherman, B. (2013). Ending childhood hunger: A social impact analysis. Washington, DC: Deloitte. Retrieved from https://www.nokidhungry.org/pdfs/school-breakfast-white-paper.pdf

Balfanz, R., & Byrnes, V. (2012). *Chronic absenteeism: Summarizing what we know from nationally available data.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools. Retrieved from http://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/FINALChronicAbsenteeismReport_May16.pdf

Bauman, C. (2016). How do you fight chronic absenteeism? Put a nurse in every school. *Chalkbeat*. Retrieved October from http://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/tn/2016/10/05/how-do-you-fight-chronic-absenteeism-put-a-nurse-in-every-school/#.WAkLoaPD-70

Beesley, A., & Anderson, C. (2007). The four-day school week: Information and recommendations. *Rural Educator, 29*(1), 48–55.

Bertsch, S. (2016). Communication, teacher engagement impact Mitchell school district's attendance. *The Daily Republic*. Retrieved from http://www.mitchellrepublic.com/news/local/4131953-communication-teacher-engagement-impact-mitchell-school-districts-attendance

Bimler, D., & Kirkland, J. (2001). School truants and truancy motivation sorted out with multidimensional scaling. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 16*(1), 75–102.

Boe, E., Cook, L., & Sunderland, R. (2008). Teacher turnover examining exit attrition, teaching area transfer and school migration. *Council for Exceptional Children, 7*5, 7–31.

Black, A., Seder, R., & Kekahio, W. (2014). Review of research on student nonenrollment and chronic absenteeism: A report for the Pacific region (REL 2015-054). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific.

Carmody, J., & Baer, R. (2008). Relationships between mindfulness practice and levels of mindfulness, medical and psychological symptoms and well-being in a mindfulness-based stress reduction program. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 31*, 23–33. doi:10.007/s10865-007-9130-7

Carroll, H. (2015). Pupil absenteeism and the educational psychologist. *Educational Studies, 41*, 47–61. doi:10.1080/03055698.2014.955731

Dam, A. (2006). *The 4-day school week*. Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Education.

De Witte, K., & Csillag, M. (2014). Does anybody notice? On the impact of improved truancy reporting on school dropout. *Education Economics, 22*(6), 549–568. Retrieved on from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kristof_De_Witte/publication/233050307_Does_anybody_notice_On_the_impact_of_improved_truancy_reporting_on_school_dropout/links/0c96052fd2d65be393000000.pdf

District Management Council. (2004). *Management advisory brief: Reducing teacher absenteeism*. Boston: Author.

Duncan, C. (2015). *Game-based learning and truancy*. Juneau, AK: University of Alaska

Southeast. Retrieved from http://www.minecraftintheclassroom.com/classroom-research-project.html

Duncan, C. (2016). How an Alaska teacher improved student attendance with Minecraft. *EdSurgeNews*. Retrieved from https://www.edsurge.com/news/2016-02-11-how-an-alaska-teacher-improved-student-attendance-with-minecraft

Dusenbury, L., Weissberg, R., & Meyers, D. (2016). How principals can promote social and emotional earning in their schools. *Principal, 96*(1), 9–11.

Epstein, J. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*, 701–712.

Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *The Journal of Educational Research, 95*(5), 308–318.

Edutopia. (2012). How daily mediation improves behavior. Retrieved from https://www.edutopia.org/stw-student-stress-meditation-overview-video

Fengfeng, K. (2008). A case study of computer gaming for math: Engaged learning from gameplay? *Computers and Education, 51*(4), 1609–1620.

Fickes, M. (2011). I can't hear you! *School Planning & Management, 50*(10), 32–35.

Flook, L., Goldberg, S., Pinger, L., Bonus, K., & Davidson, R. (2013). Mindfulness for teachers: A pilot study to assess effects on stress, burnout and teaching efficacy. *Mind, Brain and Education: The Official Journal of the International Mind, Brain, and Education Society, 7*(3). doi:10.1111/mbe.12026.

Fries, D., Carney, K. J., Blackman-Urteaga, L., & Savas, S. A. (2012). Wraparound services infusion into secondary schools as a dropout prevention strategy. *NASSP Bulletin, 96*(2), 119–136.

Gase, L., DeFosset, A., Perry, R., & Kuo, T. (2016). Youth's perspectives on the reasons underlying underlying school truancy and opportunities to improve school attendance. *The Qualitative Report, 21*(2), 299–320. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss2/8

Genao, S. (2015). Utilizing data to combat absenteeism and decrease dropout rates. *Education & Urban Society, 47*(4), 463–475. doi:10.1177/0013124513497790

Ginsburg, A., Jordan, P., & Chang, H. (2014). *Absences add up: How school attendance influences student success.* Portland, OR: Attendance Works. Retrieved from http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Absenses-Add-Up_September-3rd-2014.pdf

Gold, E., Smith, A., Hopper, I., Herne, D., Tansey, G., & Hulland, C. (2009). Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) for primary school teachers. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 19*(2), 184–189. doi:10.1007/s10826-009-9344-0

Green, G. (2014). Study to investigate self-reported teacher absenteeism and desire to leave teaching as they relate to teacher-reported teaching satisfaction, job-related stress, symptoms of depression, irrational beliefs and self-efficacy. CUNY *Academic Works*. Retrieved from http://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1318&context=gc_etds

Gysbers, N., & Henderson, P. (2012). *Developing and managing your school guidance program* (5th ed.) Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Hanover Research. (2012). Addressing teacher absenteeism and attendance. Retrieved from: http://gssaweb.org/webnew/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Addressing-Teacher-Absenteeism-and-Attendance.pdf

Harris van Keuren, C. (2009). *Teacher absenteeism and teacher accountability. USAID Education Strategy Development.* Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/2380578/Teacher_Absenteeism_and_Teacher_Accountability_USAID_Paper_

Harrison, D., Labby, S., & Sullivan, S. (2015). Absent Texas teachers: Reasons and revelations. *The Texas Forum of Teacher Education, 5*, 18-32. Retrieved from http://www.txate.org/pdf/publications/2015/Harrison-Forum2015.pdf

Hinton, M. (2016). Focus on social-emotional learning leads to improved attendance, behavior. *Education Week*. Retrieved from http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/time_and_learning/2016/09/focus_on_social-emotional_learning_leads_to_improved_attendance_behavior.html?qs=attendance+inmeta:Cover_year%3D2016

Houston Education Research Consortium. (2013). *Houston Independent School District's ASPIRE program: Estimated effects of receiving financial rewards.* Retrieved from Rice University, Kinder Institute for Urban Research website: http://kinder.rice.edu/uploadedFiles/Kinder_Institute_for_Urban_Research/Programs/HERC/2013V1I2.SHIFRER_ASPIRE20102011[3].pdf

Jacobs, K., & Kritsonis, W. (2007). An analysis of teacher and student absenteeism in urban schools: What the research says and recommendations for educational leaders. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED499647.pdf

Kearney, C. A., & Graczyk, P. (2014). A response to intervention model to promote school attendance and decrease school absenteeism. *Child & Youth Care Forum, 43*(1),1–25.

Kellogg, J., Plundrich, N., Lila, M., Croom, D., Taylor, R., Graf, B., & Raskin, I. (2016). Engaging American Indian/Alaska Native students with participatory bioexploration assays. *NACTA Journal, 60*(1), 42–50.

Kirk, M. (2016). Washers and dryers were added to 17 schools in Illinois and California and attendance rates shot up. *Business Insider.* Retrieved from http://www.businessinsider.com/washers-dryers-added-to-17-schools-attendance-rates-shot-up-2016-8

Lee, M., Goodman, C., Dandapani, N., & Kekahio, W. (2015). *Review of international research on factors underlying teacher absenteeism* (REL 2015-087). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific.

Libby, B. (2007). Log on, don't drop out: Technology trumps truancy. *Edutopia.* Retrieved from http://www.edutopia.org/los-angeles-dropout-technology

Marvul, J. N. (2012). If you build it, they will come: A successful truancy intervention program in a small high school. *Urban Education, 47*(1), 144–169. doi:10.1177/0042085911427738

McCaig, A. (2013). Financial rewards improve teacher attendance, retention and students' test scores. *Rice University News & Social Media*. Retrieved from http://news.rice.edu/2013/04/25/rice-u-study-performance-based-financial-rewards-improve-teacher-attendance-retention-and-students-test-scores/

Miller, D., & Robertson, D. (2011). Educational benefits of using game consoles in a primary classroom: A randomized controlled trial. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 45*(5), 850–864.

National Education Association. (2013). Wraparound services. Washington, DC: National Education Association. Retrieved from https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Wraparound-Services-05142013.pdf

National Indian Education Association. (2002). Using culturally based education to increase academic achievement and graduation rates. Washington, DC: National Indian Education Association. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED523558.pdf

Ngai, P., & Koehn, P. (2016). Teacher/family

partnerships for student learning: Lessons from Indian education for all in Montana. *Journal of American Indian Education, 55*(1), 23–34.

Oakes, A., & Maday, T. (2009). *Engaging Native American learners with rigor and cultural relevance*. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED507588.pdf

Obeng-Denteh, W., Yeboah, A., Sam, C., & Monkah, E. (2011). The impact of student and teacher absenteeism on student performance at the junior high school: The case of the Kumasi-Metro school district. *Continental Journal of Education Research, 4*(1), 7–17.

Oberle, E., Domitrovich, C. E., Meyers, D. C., & Weissberg, R. P. (2016). Establishing systemic social and emotional learning approaches in schools: a framework for schoolwide implementation. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 46*(3), 277–297. doi:10.1080/0305764X.2015.1125450

Owen, A. (2010). Leadership practices that influence teacher attendance in a low and high teacher absentee school. *Electronic Theses & Dissertations.* Paper 326. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1326&context=etd

Papastergiou, M. (2009). Digital game-based learning in high school computer science education: Impact on educational effectiveness and student motivation. *Computers and Education, 52*(1), 1–12.

Perrotta, C., Featherstone, G., Aston, H. & Houghton, E. (2013). Game-based learning: Latest evidence and future directions. *National Foundation for Educational Research.* Retrieved from https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/GAME01/GAME01.pdf

Pitkoff, E. (2003). School district practices that encourage teacher absenteeism. *School Administrator, 60*(6), 34.

Roderick, M., Arney, M., Axelman, M., DaCosta, K., Steiger, C., & Stone, S. (1997). *Habits hard to break: A new look at truancy in Chicago's public schools*. Research Brief. University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration.

Romero, Mariajosé, & Lee, Young-Sun. (2007). *A National Portrait of Chronic Absenteeism in Early Grades.* The National Center for Children in Poverty. Retrieved from http://academiccommons.columbia.edu/catalog/ac:126480

Roeser, R., Schonert-Reichl, K., Jha, A., Cullen, M., Wallace, L., Wilensky, R., Oberle, E., Thomson, K., Taylor, C., & Harrison, J. (2013). Mindfulness training and reductions in teacher stress and burnout: Results from two randomized, waitlist-control field trials. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 105*(3), 787–804. doi:10.1037/a0032093

Smagorinsky, P., Anglin, J., & O'Donnell-Allen, C. (2012). Identity, meaning, and engagement with school: A Native American student's composition of a life map in a senior English class. *Journal of American Indian Education, 51*(1), 27–44.

U.S. Department of Education. (2015). Joint policy letters signed by Education Secretary or Deputy Secretary. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/151007.html

U.S. Department of Education. (2016). Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation's Schools. *The Office for Civil Rights*. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html

Wilcox, K. (2015). Not at the expense of their culture: Graduating Native American youth from high school. *The High School Journal, 98*(4), 337–352.

Zins, J., Bloodworth, M., Weissberg, R., & Walberg, H. (2007). The scientific base linking social and emotional learning to school success. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 17*, 191–210.

4601 DTC Blvd., Suite 500, Denver, CO 80237-2596
Phone: 303.337.0990 • Fax: 303.337.3005 • www.mcrel.org