

August 2016

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding **the impact of chronic absenteeism on student outcomes and possible mitigating factors to chronic absenteeism.**

Ask REL Southwest is part of a collaborative Ask-A-REL reference desk service provided by the 10 regional educational laboratories (REL). By design, this service functions much in the same way as a technical reference library providing references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations for research-based education questions.

Please note that REL Southwest has not evaluated the resources themselves, but offers this list to you for your information only.

BACKGROUND

REL Southwest held a Governing Board meeting on May 2–4, 2016, in New Orleans, Louisiana. A needs-sensing focus group activity was conducted with Board members in attendance. Of the new needs identified by the group, five needs were submitted as Ask A REL questions. This response addresses one of those questions.

Following an established REL Southwest protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive briefs on (1) the impact of chronic absenteeism on student outcomes and (2) *possible mitigating factors to chronic absenteeism* for use and dissemination at the September 2016 Governing Board meeting. The sources included federally funded organizations, additional research institutions, educational databases, and general Internet searches.

QUESTION

1. What is the impact of chronic student absenteeism on student outcomes?
2. What are possible mitigating factors to chronic absenteeism?

Question 1: What is the impact of chronic student absenteeism on student outcomes?

Gottfried, M.A. (2015). Chronic absenteeism in the classroom context: Effects on achievement. *Urban Education*. http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/gottfried_chronic_peers-2.pdf.

From the abstract: “Although educational policy makers uphold that chronic absenteeism (missing 10% or more of the school year) is damaging to students’ schooling outcomes, there is little empirical research to match. This study considers the role of spillover effects of chronic absenteeism on classmates’ achievement. It does so

by utilizing a large-scale administrative urban district data set of elementary schoolchildren—a sample of students where the rates of chronic absenteeism are expected to be higher compared with the national average. The results show that students suffer academically from having chronically absent classmates—as exhibited across both reading and math testing outcomes. Chronic absenteeism not only had a damaging effect on those individuals missing excessive school days but also has the potential to reduce outcomes for others in the same educational setting.”

Gottfried, M. A. (2014). Chronic absenteeism and its effects on students' academic and socioemotional outcomes. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, v19, n2, p53-75. <http://eric.ed.gov/?q=EJ1045001>.

From the ERIC abstract: “Recent policy dialogue suggests that chronic absenteeism is not only underdocumented, but is also detrimental to the success of students as early as kindergarten. That said, almost no empirical research has examined the effects of chronic absenteeism on student outcomes. This study addresses this underresearched issue in more depth. Using a nationally representative dataset of kindergarten students from the 2010-2011 school year, this study evaluates the effect of chronic absenteeism on both achievement and socioemotional outcomes. The findings suggest that chronic absenteeism reduces math and reading achievement outcomes, reduces educational engagement, and decreases social engagement. Hence, this study offers new evidence on how an undermeasured aspect of missing school impedes students' attainment. Implications for policy and practice are discussed.”

Gottfried, M. A. (2009). Excused versus unexcused: How student absences in elementary school affect academic achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, v31 n4 p392-415. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ866928>.

From the ERIC abstract: “The literature on school absences has focused predominantly on the reasons for student truancy, or it has assessed only aggregate student absences in their effect on achievement. However, this study brings forth a new issue: the relationship between types of absences--excused versus unexcused--and school performance. With a quantitative model of educational achievement on a longitudinal multilevel data set of all second- through fourth-grade students in the Philadelphia School District from 1994 to 2000, this study disaggregated absence information to provide new insight on the attendance-achievement relationship. Specifically, a model using fixed effects with classroom-level clustering was employed to determine how the distinction among varying proportions of excused versus unexcused absences related to students' standardized test performance in reading and math. This article demonstrates that distinguishing between students with high rates of excused or unexcused absences is significant. Having a higher proportion of excused absences to total absences exhibits a positive relationship between reading and math test scores. Conversely, students with a higher proportion of unexcused absences places them at academic risk, particularly in math achievement and as early as in elementary school. Implications for policy are discussed. (Contains 3 notes, 9 tables, and 1 figure.)”

Lehr, C. A., Sinclair, M. F. & Christenson, S. L. (2004). Addressing student engagement and truancy prevention during the elementary school years: A replication study of the Check & Connect model. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)* v9, Issue 3. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ej682941>.

From the ERIC abstract: “Students who are at risk of dropping out of school can be identified retrospectively as early as third grade on the basis of attendance patterns, academic performance, and behavior. Check & Connect is a model designed to promote student engagement, support regular attendance, and improve the likelihood of school completion. The program has been used successfully with students attending middle school and high school, with and without disabilities, and in suburban and urban settings. An overview of Check & Connect, key components of the model, and an application of the model implemented with students who were referred for excessive attendance problems during elementary school years are described. Results from an evaluation of its effectiveness with students who received intervention for at least 2 years (n = 147) showed increased levels of student participation as evidenced by significant increases in the percentage of students whose absences or tardies dropped to or below 5% of the time. In addition, over 90% of the school staff (n = 123) perceived students were showing increased levels of engagement and 87% of school staff reported parents were more supportive of their child's education. Strengths and limitations of the study are discussed in light of rigorous criteria used to examine the effectiveness of social programs. In addition, directions for future research are proposed.”

Question 2: What are possible mitigating factors to chronic absenteeism?

Elliott, M.N., Hanser, L.M., & Gilroy, C.L. (2009). Career academies: Additional evidence of positive student outcomes. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, v7, Issue 1. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S15327671ESPR0701_5.

From the abstract: “We examine career academy student outcomes for 18 cohorts of entering students enrolled in a total of 8 schools in 5 major urban school districts across the United States. We focus on student attendance, grades, and graduation status, using a propensity weighting technique to adjust for selection into the career academy. Compared to what would have been expected of the same students in the general academic programs of the same schools, career academy students had higher 1st-year grade point averages, higher 1st-year attendance, and higher rates of 4-year graduation in a majority of the implementation schools.”

Rasasingham, R. (2015). The risk and protective factors of school absenteeism. *Open Journal of Psychiatry*, 5, 195-203. http://file.scirp.org/pdf/OJPsych_2015041710472353.pdf.

From the abstract: “Absenteeism from school in children and adolescents is a problem that impacts the social, emotional and educational development of the children (Haarman, 2011). While absenteeism can be seen as a short-term condition, prolonged absenteeism during childhood may be a predictor of lasting issues that may persist into

adulthood (King, Ollendick and Tonge, 1995), such as “school dropout, delinquency and occupational and relationship problems” (Kearney and Bensaheb, 2006), and economic deprivation and social, marital, occupational and psychiatric problems (Kearney and Graczyk, 2014). Early absenteeism has been associated with school dropout, further disconnecting the children from school based health programs and leading the children into economic deprivation, and marital, social and psychiatric problems in adulthood (Kogan, Luo, Murry and Brody, 2005). Furthermore, absenteeism may be an indication of “suicide attempt, perilous sexual behaviour, teenage pregnancy, violence, unintentional injury, driving under the influence of alcohol, and alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, and other substance abuse” (Kearney, 2008). The purpose of this article is to provide a review of the literature on protective and risk factors for school absenteeism in youths aged 5 to 18 years old, with focus on articles published after 2004. First, the definition of absenteeism will be discussed, followed by the prevalence and demographic of this phenomenon, the protective and risk factors of school absenteeism, and a review of intervention strategies.”

Gottfried, M. A. (2014). Can neighbor attributes predict school absences? *Urban Education* , v49 n2, p216-250. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1019883>.

From the ERIC abstract: “Recent evidence suggests that the neighborhood context, particularly for urban youth, can influence a range of outcomes. This study makes contributions to the field by examining how the neighborhood context directly relates to missing school. To do so, this study employs a large-scale, longitudinal data set of multilevel observations for entire elementary- and middle-school student cohorts in an urban district over 8 academic years. By linking urban school district administrative data with U.S. Census data, this study provides unique insight into how the characteristics of the neighbors on a student’s residential block (determined by his or her exact home address) predict school absences. The results indicate significant relationships between school absences and multiple categories of neighbor attributes, as delineated across measures of poverty, family structure, homeownership status, and race. These results are also distinguishable based on student gender, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.”

Gottfried, M. A. (2013). Retained students and classmates' absences in urban schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, v50, n6, p1392-1423. <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Retained-Students-and-Classmates-Absences-in-Urban-Schools-Dec-2013.pdf>.

From the abstract: Research in grade retention has predominantly focused on the effect of this practice on the retained student. This study contributes to the limited body of research examining the effect of retained classmates on the outcomes of other students in the same classroom. Using a longitudinal data set of all elementary school students in a large urban school district, this study evaluates how the percentage of retained classmates affects other students’ absence patterns, both unexcused and excused. Focusing on absences as an outcome is key, as they signal educational disengagement and highly correlate with schooling and lifelong success. Based on quasi-experimental methods, the results indicate that a greater percentage of retained classmates increases other students’ absences. The effect is only present on unexcused absences,

not excused absences, hence signaling an increase in disengagement in other students. Individual- and classroom-level moderating effects are evaluated, and policy implications for classroom assignment are discussed.

Gottfried, M. A. (2011). Absent peers in elementary years: The negative classroom effects of unexcused absences on standardized testing outcomes. *Teachers College Record*, v113 n8 p1597-1632. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ988295>.

From the ERIC abstract: “Background/Context: This article addresses the classroom contextual effects of absences on student achievement. Previous research on peer effects has predominantly focused on peer socioeconomic status or classroom academic ability and its effects on classmates. However, the field has been limited by not discerning the individual-level academic effects of being in classrooms with absent peers. Purpose/Objective/Research Question/Focus of the Study: The purpose of this study is to determine the peer effects of absent students in urban elementary school classrooms. Population/Participants/Subjects: The data set is longitudinal and comprises entire populations of five elementary school cohorts within the School District of Philadelphia, for a total of 33,420 student observations. Individual student records were linked to teacher and classroom data and to census block neighborhood information. Research Design: To examine the educational effects of absent peers, this study employed an empirical specification of the education production function. The dependent variables were Stanford Achievement Test Ninth Edition (SAT9) reading and math scores. Findings: Models differentiated between unexcused and total absence measures and indicated that the peer effect of absences was driven by negative effects associated with classroom rates of unexcused absences rather with rates of total absences. These findings were obtained after controlling for student, neighborhood, teacher, and classroom characteristics. Conclusions/Recommendations: Not only are absences detrimental to the absentee, but they also have a pervasive effect on the achievement of other students in the classroom.”

Sheldon, S. B & Epstein, J. L. (2004). Getting students to school: Using family and community involvement to reduce chronic absenteeism. *School Community Journal*, v14, n2, p39-56. <http://www.adi.org/journal/fw04/Sheldon%20&%20Epstein.pdf>.

From the abstract: “Students who are chronically absent are more likely than other students to drop out of school. Many schools have goals to reduce student truancy and to help chronically absent students attend school regularly. Few studies, however, have focused on whether or how family and community involvement help reduce rates of chronic absenteeism. In this longitudinal study, data were collected from 39 schools on rates of chronic absenteeism and on specific family and community involvement activities that were implemented to reduce this serious problem for student learning. Results indicate that school, family, and community partnership practices can significantly decrease chronic absenteeism, even after school level and prior rates of absenteeism are taken into account. In particular, communicating with families about attendance, celebrating good attendance with students and families, and connecting chronically absent students with community mentors measurably reduced students’ chronic absenteeism from one year to the next. Also, schools that conducted a greater

total number of attendance-focused activities were more likely to decrease the percentage of students who missed twenty or more days of school each year.”

METHODS

Search of Databases and Websites

- [Institute of Education Sciences \(IES\) website](http://www.ies.ed.gov) (<http://www.ies.ed.gov>)
- [ERIC database](http://www.eric.ed.gov) (www.eric.ed.gov)
- [Google Scholar](http://scholar.google.com) (scholar.google.com)
- Google (<https://www.google.com/>)
- Bing (<http://www.bing.com/>)

Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Searches

Absenteeism and student outcomes; student absenteeism + student outcomes; absenteeism; attendance + student outcomes; truancy; truancy + student outcomes

Criteria for Inclusion

REL Southwest selected resources that provide research on regarding the impact of chronic absenteeism on student outcomes and possible mitigating factors to chronic absenteeism. When REL Southwest staff reviewed the resources, we considered, among other things, three factors:

1. **Date of Publication:** The search was limited to studies conducted since 2000.
2. **Source and Funder of the Report/Brief/Article:** Priority was given to publications written in relevant, peer-reviewed journals or reports or produced by well-known research organizations.
3. **Methodology:** Sources include literature reviews and commissioned reports.

Ask-A-REL is a service provided by a collaborative of the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Program, funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES). This response was prepared by REL Southwest, administered by SEDL, under contract ED-IES-12-C-0012 with IES. The content of this document does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.