Beating Poverty's Impact on School Performance

Rachel Brooks
Beating Poverty’s Impact on School Performance
It Starts With Showing Up!

Chronic Absenteeism is having missed 10 percent or more of the school year or missed a month (21 days) or more of school in the past year.

An increase in income of $1,000 was associated with a 2.1% and 3.0% increase in children’s math and reading test scores, respectively. Parents who are subject to variable work schedules and linked with poorer child cognitive outcomes.

Children of low-income families experience more physical, behavioral, and mental health problems, leading to more absences. Residential and family instability makes establishing morning routines difficult.

Low Income

Chronically absent students gained 14 percent fewer literacy skills in kindergarten, and 15 percent fewer literacy skills in first grade.

A Baltimore study found a strong relationship between sixth-grade attendance and the percentage of students graduating on time or within a year of their expected high school graduation—only 13% of students missing 40 or more days graduated.

Suggestions for Every Level

Federal

- Add questions about the extent of chronic absenteeism to the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights annual school survey and use this information to target support efforts to the most impacted schools.
- When the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is reauthorized, include the measuring, monitoring, and responding to absenteeism as a required school improvement activity for states, districts and schools receiving Title 1 funds.

State

- Join the growing number of states that are implementing early warning systems that provide schools, teachers, and parents with ongoing real time data on absenteeism and flag students in need of intervention and support.
- Include measures of chronic absenteeism and regular attendance on state, district, and school reports. Students who meet the chronic absenteeism threshold are automatically referred to Child Protective Services.

Local

- Conduct a school policy audit to make sure school policies support and encourage regular school attendance. For example, lateness policies and penalties are not so onerous that they encourage students who will be late, to skip the whole day of school.

- Create web-based parental access to student attendance data and an “ask for help getting my child to school” feature.

- Make real-time data on student absenteeism available to schools, teachers, and parents. Once a month, publically report on school-level chronic and regular attendance rates.

- Organize coordinated efforts to help every student attend every day through an inter-agency task force created by mayors and governors.

Do Not Go

- Do not see the value in being there
- No one to stop them from skipping

Cannot Go

- Illness
- Family responsibilities
- Involved with juvenile justice system

Will Not Go

- Bullying/Harassment
- Uncertainty of new environments

Do Not Go

- Chronic Absenteeism

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