University-School Partnerships: Research and Best Practices in Attendance

Valerie L. Marsh, PhD
Lia Tinkelman Festenstein, EdD
Role of the University

URCUES - Grounded in the University’s partnership with East, CUES works to expand opportunities to apply quality research-based solutions at East and to leverage the knowledge gained at East to have greater reach in the revitalization of K-12 urban education regionally, nationally, and globally. Thus, CUES is creating a model for urban school improvement and a robust clearinghouse of research, practitioner guides, and other artifacts to support urban schools and the challenges they face.

urcues.org
Evolution of the Initiative

Determined by data analysis that attendance was a priority at the EPO, underlying all other initiatives

Research Brief #1: Literature Review

Research to finding schools similar to East but with 90% attendance or higher

School Visits

Research Brief #2
## Context

### Pre-EPO (2014-2015)

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<tr>
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Research Brief #2
What do we know about who is absent most?

- Both race and poverty are predictors of absenteeism; Pacific Islander and American Indian, Black, and Latinx students have the highest rates of absenteeism (Wood, 2007).

- Absenteeism is a pressing issue in urban schools and more severe in larger schools than smaller ones (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004).
**ENROLLMENT BY ETHNICITY**

- **AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE**
  - Count: 4
  - Percentage: 0%

- **BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN**
  - Count: 1,016
  - Percentage: 55%

- **HISPANIC OR LATINO**
  - Count: 553
  - Percentage: 30%

- **ASIAN OR NATIVE HAWAIIAN/OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER**
  - Count: 111
  - Percentage: 6%

- **WHITE**
  - Count: 166
  - Percentage: 9%

- **MULTIRACIAL**
  - Count: 1
  - Percentage: 0%
What do we know about why students are absent?

- Inhospitable school culture, “to avoid bullying, unsafe conditions, harassment and embarrassment” (Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012)

- Student mobility (Parke & Kanyongo, 2012)

- Illness, family responsibilities, limited transportation, and a perception of school as unnecessary or invaluable (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; DOE 2016).
What do we know about absenteeism & student outcomes?

- **Low achievement** in urban districts (Durán-Narucki, 2008; Parke & Kanyongo, 2012; Roby, 2004; Steward, Steward, Blair, Jo, & Hill, 2008).

- **Low performance** on state assessments (Roby, 2011).

- **Less likely to read at grade level** by third grade (DOE, 2016).

- Four times more likely to **drop out** of high school compared to their peers who were reading on grade level in third grade (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004).

- Students are more likely to be absent in secondary school if they were **absent chronically in elementary school** (Wood, 2007).
What do we know about approaches that work?

• Engaging school environment

• Commitment to attendance that involves frequent, regular, personal contact with parents and families

• Programs to address and improve attendance

• Systems and practices that measure and improve record-keeping and logistics

(Marsh, 2016)
Attendance Brief #1
Available at urcues.org

Research Brief | urcues.org
Written by Valerie L. Marsh, PhD
December 2016

Since the beginning of compulsory education in this country, absenteeism has been an issue, one that many educators identify as the most persistent problem schools face (Dougherty, 1999). Yet, it wasn’t until this year that the U.S. Department of Education (2016) released “Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation’s Schools: An Unprecedented Look at a Hidden Educational Crisis,” signifying a shift in awareness of chronic absenteeism as a serious problem. According to the report, based on the 2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection survey of 95,000 schools across the nation, more than 6 million students are missing 15 days or more of school a year, the defining criteria of chronic absenteeism. These 15 days are equivalent to missing three weeks of school; the 6 million students equate to 14 percent of the U.S. student population, approximately one out of every seven students. Chronic absenteeism is different from truancy or daily average attendance – the more common measures in our nation’s schools (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2016). Unlike daily average attendance, which measures how many students show up on a specific day, or truancy, which is a measure of unexcused absences, chronic absenteeism identifies individual students who are regularly missing significant numbers of school days. With the signing of President Obama’s 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act, schools now need to shift to a measure of chronic absenteeism in order to be in compliance. Many believe this is a good thing, as following absenteeism by student is a more specific and useful data point to properly address school attendance and the myriad risk factors tied to absenteeism.

Who Is Absent Most?
Both race and poverty are predictors of absenteeism; Pacific Islander and American Indian, Black, and Latina/o students have the highest rates of absenteeism. English Language Learners (ELL) and children with disabilities are also more likely than their peers to be chronically absent. Poverty, often tied to minority status, is also indicative of greater risk of missing school in significant percentages (Wood, 2007). And since urban schools comprise more minority and low-income students of color, we know that absenteeism is a pressing issue in urban schools, and more severe in larger schools than smaller ones (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004).

Why Kids Are Missing School
Students miss school for various reasons and for students who are members of racial and ethnic minorities, ELL, students with disabilities, and students who live in poverty, those reasons
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School Visits

Research Brief #2
## Identifying Exemplar Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Enrolled</th>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Low SES</th>
<th>Minority</th>
<th>Graduation</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
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What We’ve Noticed

Attendance Up Close: Reflecting on School Visits (Marsh, Meier, Festenstein, & Nelms, 2017)

• Engaging School Environment – relationships, culture
• Commitment to Attendance Involving Personal Contact with Parents & Families
• Commitment to Improve Attendance through Programs & Systems
• Record Keeping & Logistics
What We’ve Noticed
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Brief #2
While studying research provides educators with ample context and examples of best practice, spending time in high schools and conversing with staff and scholars (students) allows a different kind of learning. Hence, after synthesizing research on attendance and identifying exemplary schools (Marsh, 2016), we at the Center for Urban Education Success embarked on a series of visits to a group of schools we identified as achieving above expectations with a non-select student body. This group includes: Mott Hall V, Bronx Latin, Roosevelt High School-Early College Studies, and Poughkeepsie High School. Meeting principals, staff, and scholars as well as touring buildings gave us additional insights into schools’ philosophies, cultures, and practices. We were able to ask questions directly of practitioners and scholars; we heard their stories, walked their halls. As visitors, we each brought different perspectives – research, curricula, leadership – to our encounters, and these particular viewpoints focused our reflections. They are enumerated here, organized under the four categories of successful attendance practices previously established (Marsh, 2016): 1) Engaging school environment, 2) Commitment to attendance that involves personal contact with parents & families, 3) Attendance programs, 4) Record-keeping & logistics.

Engaging School Environment
These are aspects of a school’s life that scholars, staff, and administrators name when attributing credit for good attendance. This category captures the majority of what we learned during our visits, and has thus expanded into two subcategories: Relationships and Culture (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Dougherty, 1999; Durán-Narucki, 2008; Sheldon, 2007).

Relationships. All the schools we visited place a high value on relationships and treating the school like a home and the scholars like family. Here is some of what we noticed about relationships during our visits:

- School leaders and staff connect personally with individual scholars, spending a lot of time walking the building, making quick, personal contact with every scholar they see.
  - Personal touch is “everything” (Principal).
  - Principal knows all of his scholars; greets them by name every day.
  - Every scholar fist bumped their principal as they passed him.
  - During a meeting we had with a group of scholars, one commented, “Some people who don’t have self-esteem, they find it hard to learn in a really big
What We Did with What We Found

Attendance Protocols - Research-Practice Comparison Document

Outcomes
Data Tracking

Attendance Tracker at East by Marking Period
## Current Attendance Data

**EPO Year 3 (2017-2018)** *(Same chart from previous page; included here for easy comparison with charts above)*

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<th>Grade</th>
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Attendance Trends at East

All grade levels in all months during the 2017-2018 school year demonstrate higher attendance than all grade levels in all months in the pre-EPO 2014-2015 school year.
Discussion

Small group

Discuss challenges in your schools

What problem would you want to tackle?

How could you envision a partnership of theory and practice?
Take-aways

Implications for your own work.