CENTER FOR NEW YORK CITY AFFAIRS
THE NEW SCHOOL

A Better Picture of Poverty

What Chronic Absenteeism and Risk Load Reveal About NYC's Lowest-Income Elementary Schools

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Autumn typically marks a new beginning for the city's public schools. This fall, the winds of change are especially brisk, as leaders at every level of the school system are being challenged to think and act anew in addressing the effects of income inequality on academic performance. As this report went to press, City Hall was announcing funds for some 45 new community schools—intensive partnerships of educators and health and human services providers that are intended to help typically very low-income students thrive, scholastically and socially. They will be the first of a projected 100 new community schools Mayor Bill de Blasio has pledged to launch in his first term.

The community schools initiative occupies a crucial part of the de Blasio administration's overall education strategy. Like the push for universal all-day Pre-K education and the planned increase in after-school programs for middle school students, community schools are intended to help close the book on the bleak "tale of two cities" de Blasio decried in his 2013 mayoral campaign. Community schools also mark a sharp departure from the education philosophy of the Bloomberg administration, which stressed standards, accountability and leadership in improving classroom results, and which had little patience with anything that smacked of making poverty "an excuse" for schools that lagged.

Nevertheless, both philosophies converge when addressing one major issue: reducing the city's shockingly high rate of chronic student absenteeism. The Bloomberg administration's effort in this area were inspired by a pioneering 2008 report by the Center for New York City Affairs at The New School, which found that more than approximately 90,000 elementary-level students—more than 23 percent of system-wide enrollment in kindergarten through fifth grade—were absent for at least 10 percent of the total school year (some 18 days or more of classes, depending on the year). As then–City Councilman de Blasio pointed out, until absenteeism is reduced, no other school reforms make sense. And now the first round of Mayor de Blasio's community schools initiative is being launched with state education funds earmarked for reducing absenteeism.

ABSENTEEISM AND ENDEMIC POVERTY

This new report, *A Better Picture of Poverty,* achieves two goals. First, it updates and refines the Center's groundbreaking research from six years ago on chronic absenteeism in elementary schools. While chronic absenteeism is an important issue for all students, and is even more prevalent among middle school and high school students, the Center has remained focused on elementary students because they have the most to lose from a bad start on their education—and our research finds that it is easier to change their attendance behavior at this age, since kids and parents tend to be more available and interested in support schools might offer.

New York City has made welcome progress on absenteeism since the Center's first report in 2008, but there is a new wave of work to be done.

Nearly 130 elementary schools struggle with persistent chronic absenteeism. This problem is closely tied to poverty and a school's total risk load.

We found that despite welcome progress since 2008, in far too many schools very large numbers of students are still chronically absent. The number of elementary school chronic absentees has gone down substantially since our report, from 23 percent of K to 5 students in 2009 to 19 percent in 2013. The Bloomberg administration's successes notwithstanding, system-wide some 87,000 children from grades K to 5 were chronically absent in the 2012–13 school year. We also found an uneven pattern of success in the Bloomberg focus on absenteeism. In some schools, relatively inexpensive reforms made a substantial difference; in other schools, they weren't sufficient, and something more was clearly needed.

In fact, our research into 748 elementary and K to 8 schools identifies nearly 130 that struggle with what in this report we define as "persistent chronic absenteeism." They are schools where, on average, at least one-third of students have missed 10 percent or more of classes—the equivalent of almost a month of school days—for five consecutive school years. (In 33 schools, average chronic absenteeism was more than 40 percent over these five years.) We've focused on such endemic absenteeism in the early grades because of the clearly pernicious effects it has on students' academic achievement, both immediate and long term. Persistent chronic absenteeism, for example, contributes to the dishearteningly slight success that students in such schools have had meeting the state's new, academically rigorous Common Core learning standards. In the 2012–13 school year, only about 11 percent of students at schools with persistent chronic absenteeism passed Common Core–aligned math and reading tests, compared with a pass rate of more than 30 percent at other elementary and K to 8 schools citywide.

Second, and significantly, we've also looked at these absenteeism-endemic schools through the lens of what we characterize as a "total risk load" of social and educational factors in the schools. Our goal: To identify New York City's "truly disadvantaged" public schools. This is a concept brought forward by researchers at the Consortium on Chicago School Research (who expanded on the term by the renowned urban sociologist William Julius Wilson). Some urban schools serve students and their families who face the heaviest misery and hardship imposed by poverty and family dysfunction, and these are typically in neighborhoods most bereft of the reserves of community "social capital" that can offset poverty's worst effects. They are, in short, prime candidates for the de Blasio administration's community schools effort.

Inspired by recent research on truly disadvantaged public schools in Chicago and Philadelphia, we devised a risk load instrument of 18 salient indicators from census data and other sources. We wanted to go beyond the yardsticks commonly used to measure poverty in the schools. When, for example, some 80 percent of public school students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, such familiar statistical brushes paint with strokes far too broad to be very useful.

Instead, we concentrated on indicators of what can be called "deep poverty," such as the percentage of the student body living in temporary or public housing, the number of students' families that have at some time faced allegations of child abuse or neglect, and adult educational attainments in the community served by the school. Our risk load assessment also took account of each school's own stability and viability, including data on school safety, turnover among administrators and classroom teachers, and student suspensions.

We found the constellation of public schools plagued by persistent chronic absenteeism among their elementary-grade students closely correlates with schools bearing the largest total risk loads—those where poverty's effects are most overwhelming for families, and for educators, too. A caveat: This conclusion is based on our rough assessment of risk load, which draws only on the most recent publicly available data sources. We would be very interested in seeing New York City duplicate our risk load analysis using the city's internal student and family databases.

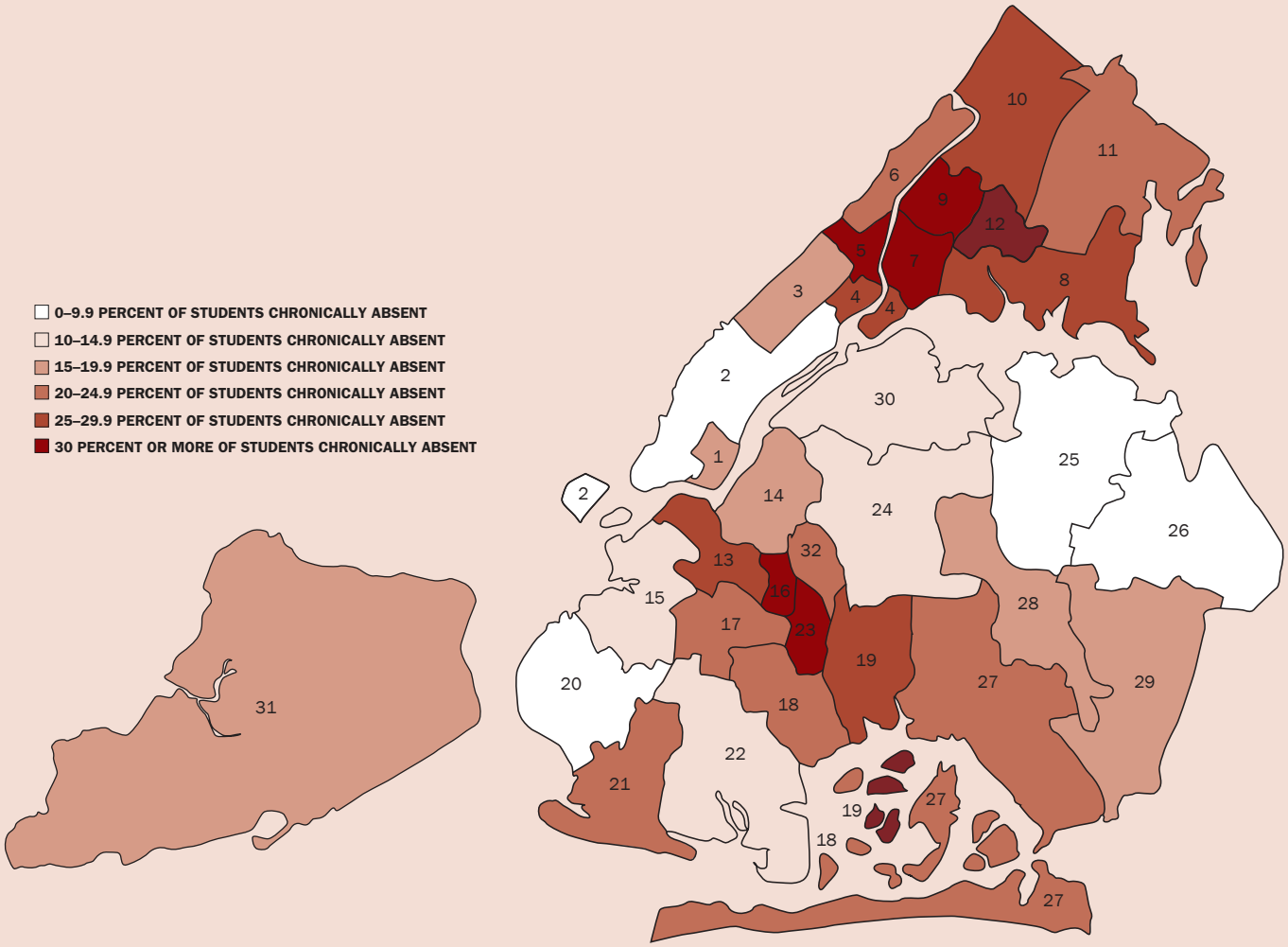
Nevertheless, the message to those leading the community schools initiative is loud and clear. The incidence of persistent chronic absenteeism strongly corresponds with where deep poverty is most virulent and entrenched in students' lives, where it matches up with and contributes to school dysfunction, and where ameliorative social supports like those envisioned for the city's new community schools are most badly needed.

Because the past is prologue, the report also looks at what the city has done previously to combat the problems that we've just summarized. That includes evaluating the Bloomberg administration's three-year-long assault on chronic student absenteeism, led by the now-defunct Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism, and School Engagement. (See "Three Years, Many Lessons," page 34.)

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM IS HIGHEST IN LOW-INCOME DISTRICTS

Chronic absenteeism is a challenge for elementary schools throughout New York City, but schools in low-income areas like Central Brooklyn and the South Bronx tend to have the toughest problems. In District 23 Oceanhill-Brownsville, almost 40 percent of students were chronically absent in 2012-13. See the chart on page 56 for more information on each district.

LEVELS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM BY DISTRICT



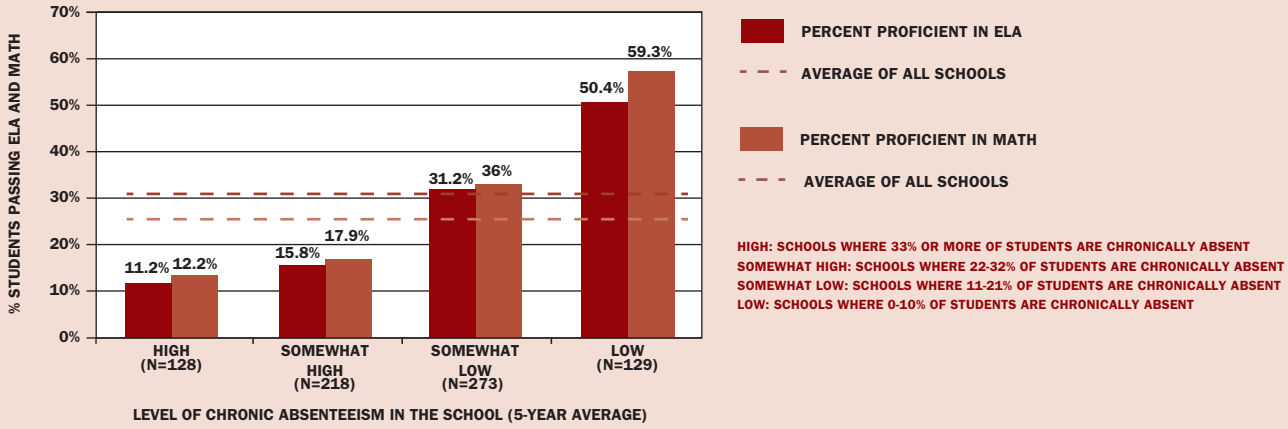
SOURCE: New York City Department of Education: Individual student attendance data, 2012-13. Includes 748 elementary and K-8 schools. Analysis excludes charter schools, schools in districts 75 and 79 and schools with insufficient data.

ABSENTEEISM AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS ARE TIGHTLY LINKED

STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS WITH HIGH CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM STRUGGLE TO PASS THE NEW COMMON CORE-ALIGNED TESTS

Students in low-income communities have been struggling to pass much tougher achievement tests aligned to New York State's Common Core learning standards. Schools with high levels of chronic absenteeism have been hit particularly hard. The chart below shows that attendance and achievement are tightly related in New York City. In schools with persistently high levels of chronic absenteeism, barely one in ten students passed the 2012-13 tests. In contrast, more than half of students passed in schools with low levels of absenteeism.

2012-13 COMMON CORE TEST SCORES BY ABSENTEEISM LEVEL



SOURCE: *New York City Department of Education: Individual student attendance data, 2008-09 to 2012-13. Individual student standardized test data for math and ELA, 2012-13. Includes 748 elementary and K-8 schools. Analysis excludes charter schools, schools in districts 75 and 79 and schools with insufficient data.*

In the same spirit, we report on the successes, and shortcomings, to date in some of the schools grappling with persistent chronic absenteeism. What Tolstoy wrote about unhappy families—that they're each unhappy in different ways—applies to these schools, too. Our researchers found that similar rates of family poverty can feel very different in a school, depending on what kind of challenges students face within their families and on the streets. That helps explain why we found schools with very similar demographic profiles that posted significantly divergent track records in reducing chronic absenteeism. We also found that determined school leadership can make a big difference in reducing absenteeism. When principals made reducing chronic absenteeism a major priority, relatively minor investments of resources not only typically increased attendance; they also markedly improved student academic performance. (See "Measuring the Weight of Poverty," page 10.)

To better understand the profound and complex ways that deep poverty can impact school attendance, we dive into one specific issue: homelessness and the problems attendant to life in the city's system of temporary shelters. More than 80,000 of New York City school students were homeless at some point during the 2012–13 school year, according to the state education department, and while the city has launched programs dedicated to fighting absenteeism for these kids, problems ranging from transportation troubles to a lack of school support continue to make it very difficult to be homeless and a student who regularly attends school. (See "Without a Home," page 41.)

A STRATEGY FOR HIGHEST-NEED SCHOOLS

Because of the importance of the de Blasio administration's still-emerging community schools initiative to fighting chronic absenteeism and the effects of deep poverty in New York City's public schools, we report on lessons learned from New York's own Beacon schools and community schools overseen by the Children's Aid Society, as well as the experience of Cincinnati, Oakland, Chicago and other cities with community schools. (See "School, Expanded," page 46.)

But precisely because so much is riding on the success of the community schools effort, this can't be a race that inevitably goes only to the swift. An administration as serious as this one is about ameliorating poverty's effects on the next generation must ensure that the most disadvantaged aren't simply left behind once again. While the risk load tool we've created represents a significant start in identifying the city's highest-needs students, it's only a start. The de Blasio administration can and should build on the Worker Connect infrastructure, which allows city agencies to share valuable information about families with which they're working to improve coordination and services. The city's Department of Education is only now becoming part of this system. As they do, the hope is that schools will be able to work more easily with other important agencies, including the Department of Homeless Services and the Administration for Children's Services, which may have huge influences on their students' lives. Worker Connect also holds promise for improving the information that school nonprofit partners may be able to work with, a critical part of the city's efforts to run new community schools efficiently and effectively. (See "Do I Know You?" page 49.)

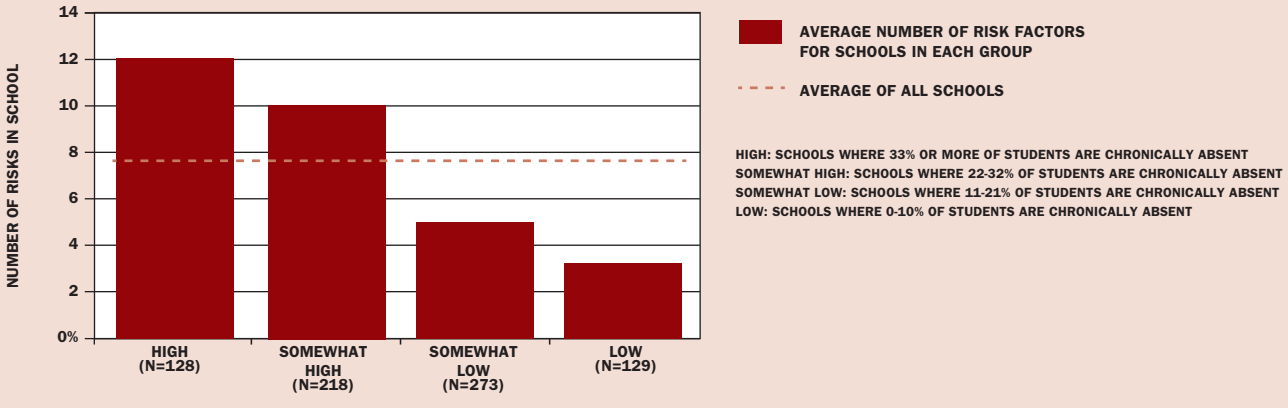
We also address the thorny question of equity in developing community schools, and of finding alternative ways to help students in the city's truly disadvantaged schools. A highly competitive "request for proposals" process has guided the first round of selecting community schools, a process legitimately designed to identify the candidates best able to successfully manage a difficult new undertaking. It may, nevertheless, pass over many of the highest-needs schools: First, because the staggering challenges they face may leave them least likely to have the time, energy or organizational wherewithal to write sophisticated proposals and manage grants; and second, because there are simply so many of these schools (starting with the approximately 130 identified in this study), and only so many dollars to go around. (See "Which Schools First?" page 53.)

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AND SCHOOL RISK LEVELS ARE TIGHTLY LINKED

SCHOOLS WITH HIGH CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM FACE MORE CHALLENGES AT THE COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL LEVEL

Poverty is not destiny in New York City schools. A Center analysis found that elementary schools with similar levels of community poverty could look quite different depending on the number of other risks present in the school (like high teacher turnover) or in students' lives (like homelessness). When the Center measured 18 potential risks in the city's elementary schools, as well as persistent chronic absenteeism, we found that, on average, schools with higher risk factors were more likely to have problems with attendance. Chronic absenteeism may be a useful tool for identifying schools that could benefit from poverty-related supports.

AVERAGE NUMBER OF SCHOOL RISKS BY ABSENTEEISM LEVEL



SOURCE: *New York City Department of Education: Individual student attendance data, 2008-09 to 2012-13. Center for New York City Affairs analysis of school risk load factors. (See page 13 for details.) Includes 748 elementary and K-8 schools. Analysis excludes charter schools, schools in districts 75 and 79 and schools with insufficient data.*

ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS: FACTS AND FIGURES

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM HAS BEEN DRIVEN DOWN IN RECENT YEARS, FROM 23 PERCENT OF K TO 5 STUDENTS IN 2009 TO 19 PERCENT IN 2013. The numbers, however, are still very high. Some 87,000 children were chronically absent in the 2012–13 school year. And in many schools, the numbers have not improved. (See "Measuring the Weight of Poverty," page 10.)

ATTENDANCE JUMPS UP AND DOWN IN EVERY SCHOOL, BUT THE DIPS ARE MUCH DEEPER IN POOR COMMUNITIES. School principals have long argued that certain attendance factors are out of their control. The biggest of these is weather. Heavy snow, bitter cold or steady rain can send attendance diving throughout the city. But a lot of other factors affect attendance as well, and those "bad attendance days" tend to hit low-income communities harder than the city as a whole. (See "The City's Day-to-Day Attendance Jumps Up and Down Like a Heartbeat," page 32.)

MANY SCHOOLS DEAL WITH PERSISENTLY HIGH RATES OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM. Nearly 130 of the 748 elementary and K to 8 schools that the Center for New York City Affairs studied struggle with "persistent chronic absenteeism." (On average, one third or more of students had been chronically absent over five years.) There are 36 schools where the number of chronically absent students has been, on average, above 40 percent over the past five years. (See "Measuring the Weight of Poverty," page 10.)

IN EFFORTS TO HELP TO SCHOOLS, IT'S IMPORTANT TO LOOK BEYOND FREE LUNCH AND POVERTY MEASURES. A 2013 study in Philadelphia concluded that homelessness, child maltreatment and a mother's level of education were the strongest predictors of a child's school achievement. The team also calculated a "cumulative risk gap" for each student for a separate study. The results were "incredible," says John Fantuzzo, the team's lead author. The risk gap number largely predicted each student's reading score, he says. "These risks have a unique impact on achievement." (See "Measuring the Weight of Poverty," page 10.)

THE CENTER'S "RISK LOAD" TOOL COMPILES DATA FOR 18 POVERTY-RELATED FACTORS THAT MAY IMPACT ON STUDENTS' EDUCATION. From teacher turnover to the number of students who are homeless, our analysis shows that the connection between chronic absenteeism and the characteristics of deep poverty are clear. We also found that the risk load and risk profiles vary greatly from school to school, even among schools with similar simple poverty-level measures. City efforts to improve support to high-poverty schools should be designed with a school's risk load and risk profile in mind. (See "Chronic Absenteeism Reflects the Community- and School-Level Risks," page 20.)

THERE ARE IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS FOR MAYOR DE BLASIO AS HIS TEAM ROLLS OUT EXPENSIVE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE ACADEMICS AND ENGAGEMENT IN HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS. As the mayor launches initiatives like universal, full-day Pre-K (at a cost of $300 million), a major expansion of middle-grade after-school programs and plans to open 100 new community schools, Hedy Chang, director of Attendance Works, asks, "Are you doing this to target your most needy kids?" If that's a goal, the city should use chronic absenteeism rates to help determine which schools and communities most need the help, and educators and community partners should use lists of which kids miss too much school to help target the city's new programs. (See "Measuring the Weight of Poverty," page 10.)

ABSENTEEISM IS A STRONG PREDICTOR OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS AND THE SCHOOL. Our analysis found that absenteeism rates were more useful for predicting a school's test scores than other common student measures, including whether a student was in special education, an English language learner or receiving free lunch. The Center's analysis also suggests that absenteeism can have a substantial effect on the school as a whole. On average, the number of students passing the New York State tests goes down by 1.3 percent for every percentage point increase in chronic absenteeism. (See "Back to School," page 22.)

Clearly, chronic absenteeism is a complicated issue. The good news is that experience and research show that there are tools that can make a notable, measurable difference. The recommendations on the following pages include ideas about leveling this playing field for the students most at risk and most in need—for finding ways to provide the social supports they need for their education, either through community schools or by other means. We also make practical suggestions about what principals and teachers can do, immediately, to begin reducing persistent chronic absenteeism among their students. Our research tells us that this is an issue in which neither the previous administration nor the current one is all wrong or all right. Effective school leadership can indeed make a big difference in even the most deeply impoverished communities. At the same time, the evidence is undeniable that the most appalling levels of persistent chronic absenteeism are found where deep poverty's burdens are heaviest; lightening those burdens is a duty New York City can't shirk. ✶

Recommendations From the Field

A groundbreaking 2008 report by the Center for New York City Affairs at The New School cast a penetrating light on the then-underappreciated but shockingly widespread problem of chronic absenteeism in the city's public schools. It found that chronic absenteeism—defined as being missing from school for at least 10 percent of the academic year—was particularly widespread among the city's lowest-income students, hindering their success in school.

This new report updates and refines that original research. It shows that despite measurable progress in recent years, a dispiritingly high 19 percent of elementary-grade students are still chronically absent from school. Moreover, it describes what we for the first time define as "persistent chronic absenteeism"—widespread absenteeism that has continued for at least five consecutive school years, a problem plaguing nearly 130 schools with elementary-level students. The report shows that schools facing such endemic absenteeism are also typically what we term "truly disadvantaged," burdened by high risk loads associated with deep and abiding poverty and hampered by a paucity of offsetting social capital. It describes efforts to reduce absenteeism under the administration of the previous mayor, Michael Bloomberg. It also indicates how current Mayor Bill de Blasio's community schools initiative can take up the dual challenge of increasing school attendance and relieving the burdens that poverty imposes on students in truly disadvantaged schools.

In the six years since our first report, a new factor—the adoption of the tough Common Core learning standards—has added increased urgency to these tasks. From the earliest grade levels, the Common Core sets a demanding academic pace and requires steadily more with each passing year from students facing rigorous new standardized state tests. As this new report indicates, there's little hope of helping students in our truly disadvantaged schools succeed in their Common Core–defined studies without reducing persistent chronic absenteeism and addressing the social and academic factors that abet such endemic absenteeism. Indeed, in the Common Core era, the prospects for academic success are slight for any chronically absent student in any school in our city.

This report identifies three principal and complementary approaches to addressing these challenges:

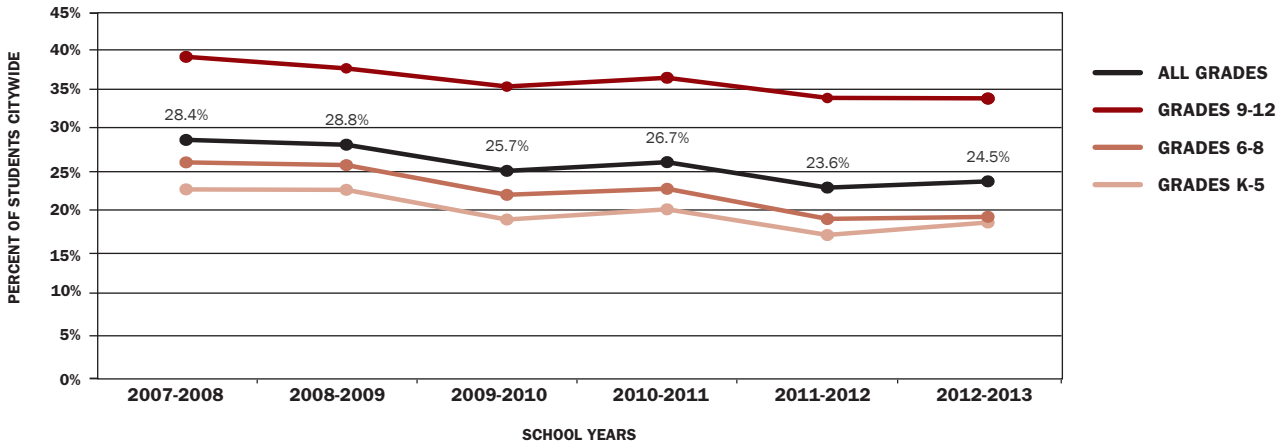
- Continue and refine the absenteeism reduction work done by the Bloomberg administration between 2010 and 2013;
- Use the new yardstick of persistent chronic absenteeism to guide efforts to help students in the city's truly disadvantaged schools, through the community schools initiative and by other means; and
- Adopt practical school-level reforms to reduce absenteeism that can be adopted in all schools—not just those that are truly disadvantaged—across the city.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Continue the work of the Bloomberg administration's Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism, and School Engagement. City Hall, the New York City Department of Education, and education practitioners and researchers learned a great deal during this three-year project, which was inspired by the 2008 report of the Center for New York City Affairs. The task force's efforts demonstrated that in many cases, relatively low-cost investments in reducing absenteeism can pay off. Often enough, progress was achieved by simply identifying the students who were chronically absent in a school, and connecting them to adults committed to paying attention to them and getting them to school. Such progress meant not only improved attendance; it also often translated into higher student academic achievement.

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM HAS GONE DOWN CITYWIDE, BUT THE TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS IS STILL HIGH

The New York City Department of Education has been working to reduce chronic absenteeism citywide and the city has made progress. The number of chronically absent students went down five percentage points in five years, from 28.4 percent in 2007-08 to 24.5 percent in 2012-13. High school students still have the greatest problem with absenteeism: More than 35 percent of high school students miss one out of every ten days—and nearly 20 percent miss two out of every 10 days. One very bright spot: the rate of middle school chronic absenteeism has gone down substantially over the last five years. The rates in these grades are now roughly at the levels seen for much younger children: Some 20 percent of middle-schoolers and 19 percent of elementary students were chronically absent in 2012-13. While the progress is heartening, the total numbers are still daunting: nearly 240,000 students were chronically absent in 2012-13.

PERCENTAGE OF CHRONICALLY ABSENT STUDENTS: 2007-08 TO 2012-13



SOURCE: *New York City Department of Education: Individual student attendance data, 2007-08 to 2012-13.*

RECOMMENDATION 2: Use the city's interconnected data systems to identify schools facing persistently high levels of chronic absenteeism and the risk factors associated with deep poverty. The research at the heart of this report finds a strong correlation between persistent chronic absenteeism (schools in which a third or more of elementary-grade students were not present for at least 10 percent of their school days on average over five years) and high risk load schools (those with at least 12 of the 18 risk load factors we identified, using publicly available data sets). This was, however, only a preliminary effort; city officials should continue this research, and refine it by using the more exacting and enlightening information available from city agency databases. The city should use this information to target more intense and focused supports to these schools.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Through the community schools initiative or other means, address the health and social needs of students in truly disadvantaged schools that have high levels of persistent chronic absenteeism and high risk load numbers. The reality is that many truly disadvantaged schools may lack the administrative capacity they need to be included in the first wave of the city's new community schools. City officials must nevertheless either provide supportive resources that would allow these schools to become community schools or devise alternative strategies for meeting the often overwhelming health, familial and psycho-social needs of their students. The city could, for example, take a page from former Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew's playbook and revisit how he designated high-needs schools to be part of a virtual "Chancellor's District" receiving top-level administrative attention. A similar classification now would, at the very least, send the message that truly disadvantaged schools are a top citywide priority at the Department of Education's Tweed Courthouse offices.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Use City Hall's new "Children's Cabinet" to enlist and coordinate the work of all relevant city agencies in addressing the needs of students in truly disadvantaged schools. For innovation in city government to thrive, good ideas and good intentions alone aren't enough; institutional muscle also matters. The de Blasio administration's "Children's Cabinet" can provide such muscle. Consisting of all city agencies relevant to the

community schools effort, the cabinet reports directly to Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives Richard Buery, who is overseeing the community schools initiative. That gives it the scope and authority to address effectively the needs of highly disadvantaged schools. It can lead efforts to promote cooperation, communication and data-sharing among schools and social service providers—all essential to the management of the community schools effort—and the ongoing research necessary to continually improve the initiative.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Continue to improve strategies for reducing chronic absenteeism citywide. While the focus of this report is on truly disadvantaged schools where chronic absenteeism is endemic, the fact is that most other schools have at least some chronically absent students at high risk of long-term academic failure. Officials at the Department of Education have been working hard on getting the word out about absenteeism and trying to convince principals that the matter is worth their heavily divided time. But there is much more the city could do to both increase awareness of the problem and help principals improve attendance in their schools, starting with these three relatively low-cost suggestions.

Raise the profile of chronic absenteeism, both publicly and in schools: Right now, principals most closely watch their "average daily attendance," which calculates the percentage of kids who are in school on any given day. A school's average daily attendance is almost always above 90 percent, which psychologically sounds good. (As a principal told one of our researchers, "90 percent is an 'A.'") But this number obscures the number of students at risk of missing too much school; a school with 90 percent attendance can also easily have more than a third of its kids chronically absent—a terrible number in anyone's book. New York City should consider sidelining the statistic of "average daily attendance" and replace it with the much more descriptive chronic absenteeism number.

Offer visual tools that allow principals to easily see which students are chronically absent and what their patterns of absenteeism are. Principals are currently told how many of their students are absent, who they are and how many days they've missed. But this does not reveal the patterns or causes behind the absenteeism. The Center for New York Affairs has developed visual tools that allow principals to more easily spot school-wide patterns (like too many kids missing Mondays and Fridays or days before vacations). Such tools also help busy school staff quickly and easily identify kids who need immediate attention and support.

Help schools identify the primary drivers of absenteeism and develop a three-pronged approach to reducing absenteeism. Center research shows that reasons for high rates of student absenteeism, such as homelessness, chronic asthma, or extended family visits to distant immigrant homelands, differ from school to school and from student to student. To reduce chronic absenteeism, school staffers need to do the detective work of talking to students and families to discover what drives absenteeism numbers up.

Educators should also recognize that most students can benefit from one of three approaches to reducing their absenteeism. For the majority, focused personal attention from concerned adults in the schools, including rewards for better attendance, may well suffice. A second tier of students and families may require that a guidance counselor, principal or other caring adult work with parents on simple strategies to improve attendance. In a third instance, some families may need assistance from professional social workers or social service agencies—precisely the kind of help contemplated by the de Blasio administration's community schools initiative.

The de Blasio administration's commitment to reducing income inequality in New York City banks heavily on efforts involving the public schools. We believe that applying the recommendations we've just described to reducing absenteeism, especially where it is endemic, will go a long way toward making that strategy a success. ✶

Measuring the Weight of Poverty

Absenteeism is closely tied to poverty and its ills. Stemming the problem and improving academics will require Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration to understand the nature and needs of New York City's "truly disadvantaged" schools.

Mayor Bill de Blasio is promising an intense focus on the educational needs of low-income students. This is critical given the state's tough new learning standards.

In 2008, the Center for New York City Affairs published a widely discussed report revealing that one in every five elementary school students in the city—more than 90,000 children—were chronically absent from school, missing the equivalent of a month or more of their school year. The problem was particularly acute in high-poverty neighborhoods, where 40 percent or more of students were chronically absent in some buildings.

The image of so many children getting such a poor start to their academic careers captured the attention of the press, the Department of Education, Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the City Council. Then–City Council member Bill de Blasio led a joint oversight committee hearing on the problem, questioning how such numbers could even be possible. "It's an astounding figure," he said. "If we can't do better on absenteeism, then none of our other educational outcomes make sense."

A great deal has happened since 2008, including an attendance awareness campaign by the Department of Education and a three-year, interagency pilot program led by Mayor Bloomberg that sought to find new ways to deal with truancy in all grades. The number of elementary school chronic absentees has gone down substantially since our report, from 23 percent of K to 5 students in 2009 to 19 percent in 2013. A recent evaluation of Mayor Bloomberg's attendance intervention pilot by Robert Balfanz and Vaughan Byrnes at Johns Hopkins University found notable improvements in attendance and academic success for chronically absent students, including results that "were particularly pronounced for students who live in poverty, are homeless or overage for their grade—the very students who benefit the most from being in school every day."

Despite the good work done in New York City to reduce chronic absenteeism, the number of chronically absent elementary school students still hovers around one in every five students; some 87,000 children from grades K to 5 were chronically absent in the 2012–13 school year. And while absentee rates have dropped overall, in many schools across the city the numbers have not budged. More than one-sixth of New York City's elementary schools still struggle with high absenteeism rates—along with test-scores that remain stubbornly low. (See "Chronic Absenteeism Has Gone Down Citywide," page 8 and "Absenteeism and Academic Success Are Tightly Linked," page 4.)

Bill de Blasio, now mayor, is promising an intense focus on the educational needs of New York City's low-income families. This effort will be critical given the vast number of low-income families in the city and the fact that these students will now be responsible for mastering much tougher material under New York State's new Common Core learning standards. By all accounts, the curriculum is faster paced and requires more active class participation. The Common Core is also designed to be less repetitive than the old standards, and students who aren't in class to learn important material in the early grades may struggle to catch up with their classmates later on.

Tracking and monitoring chronic absenteeism also presents an interesting opportunity for improving schools citywide. Absenteeism is a particularly helpful warning sign in that it can easily identify both students *and* schools in need of attention and help. At the school level, it is simple to track and

generate lists of at-risk students. Any student who has missed 10 percent or more of the school year is flagged and the Department of Education produces a report with those student names every week for each principal. Citywide, officials could scrutinize the city's absenteeism rates and develop a plan for assisting schools with the most challenging numbers. Our own analysis of the data revealed nearly 130 elementary and K to 8 schools with persistently high levels of chronic absenteeism. These schools also tend to have high numbers of students who are at risk in many other ways, our analysis shows. Schools with "persistent chronic absenteeism" could receive help from the Department of Education or from poverty-related supports that are currently being developed, like Mayor de Blasio's new community schools.

In the report on Mayor Bloomberg's attendance initiative, Balfanz concluded that addressing high rates of absenteeism is not only possible, it can be relatively inexpensive. And when students, families and schools are made aware of the problem and take steps to resolve it, learning outcomes can improve measurably. "As dangerous as chronic absenteeism is for a student's success and post-secondary opportunities, improvements in attendance can reverse or limit the damage," the report noted. (See "Back to School," page 22 and "Students Who Recover from Chronic Absenteeism Do Better," page 39.)

There are important implications for Mayor de Blasio as his team begins to roll out a number of expensive efforts to improve academics and engagement in high-poverty schools, including the mayor's $300 million Pre-K initiative, a major expansion of middle-grade after-school programs and plans to open 100 new community schools citywide.

"Are you doing this to target your most needy kids?" asks Hedy Chang, director of Attendance Works, a national think tank focused on bringing attention to chronic absenteeism. If that's a goal, she argues, educators and their community partners should know which kids miss too much school and work off these lists to make sure the kids benefit from the city's new programs. It is important to have a strategy for the lowest-income students, who are the most vulnerable to absenteeism and dropping out, she says. "If you want to justify this new investment, you need to make sure the students are there."

As the mayor ramps up his high-profile education initiatives, one observer asks: "Are you doing this to target your most needy kids?"

TRULY DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS

Research for this project began in 2011, shortly after the release of *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*, an important book from the Consortium on Chicago School Research. The authors, based at the University of Chicago, dissected years of school, social service and U.S. Census data to come up with a "framework of essential supports" needed for successful schools, particularly those serving high-poverty neighborhoods. The researchers followed reform efforts in Chicago starting in the late 1980s, documenting what worked and what didn't in the complicated interrelationships between the district, school leaders, teachers, students and the neighborhood community. They found that strong leadership, high-quality teaching, strong professional development and cultivated parent and community ties were all essential for building a successful school.

One aspect of the book that was particularly interesting to our researchers was what the authors identified as a "previously unrecognized" class of schools: the "truly disadvantaged" (a term that sociologist William Julius Wilson first used to describe communities in Chicago that had been paralyzed with isolation and economic abandonment). Schools in this category stagnated or continued to spiral downward even as efforts to improve schools serving similar, but somewhat less impoverished, families found more success.

To identify truly disadvantaged schools, the Chicago Consortium's researchers used a collection of markers that aimed to dig deeper than standard poverty rates or free and reduced-lunch benchmarks. They measured the level of outright poverty in a school's catchment by looking at U.S. Census data on the percentage of families in poverty and the percentage of males employed. They also used data

Researchers in Chicago identified a small group of schools that were "truly disadvantaged." These schools confront "an extraordinary concentration of student needs."

on average years of education and the percentage of management professionals among residents in a school's catchment area as proxies for the community's "social capital"—an important figure for measuring the potential educational influence of parents—and they factored in student child welfare data for each school and crime data in the surrounding neighborhood.

The Chicago research team found 46 public schools in the city that were "quite different from the rest of the school system." On average, 70 percent of the area residents were living below the poverty line and six out of 10 families were living in public housing. The schools were large and struggling with high rates of student mobility. Many schools, the authors added, "confronted an extraordinary concentration of student needs, including students who were homeless, in foster care, or living in contexts of neglect, abuse and domestic violence." Staff in these schools tried to respond, but their efforts mostly failed to produce real improvement in educational outcomes for the students. The authors asked: "What was it about these school communities that made them especially hard to improve?"

They concluded that truly disadvantaged schools required far more district support than typical low-income schools to succeed. "From a policy perspective, you have to put different kinds of resources and expectations in these schools," says coauthor Elaine Allensworth, director of the Chicago Consortium.

Other researchers have found similar results. A 2013 study of student data in Philadelphia by scholars at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education concluded that homelessness, child maltreatment and a mother's level of education were the strongest predictors of a child's school achievement. "It's not poverty itself that predicts achievement. It's the other risk factors that are associated with poverty," Heather Rouse, one of the study's authors, told a reporter at the 2014 gathering of the American Educational Research Association.

The recent work coming out of Philadelphia has been remarkable because the city has an integrated data system that links student education data to information collected by the city's health and human services agencies, allowing scholars to measure the combined family-level risks each student may be facing.[1] The University of Pennsylvania team used this dataset to calculate a "cumulative risk gap" for each student. The results were "incredible," says John Fantuzzo, the team's lead author. The risk gap number largely predicted each student's reading score, he says. "These risks have a unique impact on achievement."

After more than a decade of education policy dominated by the idea that poverty cannot be used as an excuse for poor teaching, new voices are emerging suggesting that schools need to be run differently in high-poverty neighborhoods to meet with success. "Students and staff in high-poverty schools face more curveballs in a week than their colleagues in low-poverty schools see in a year," argue Andrew Calkins and his coauthors in *The Turnaround Challenge,* an influential report published in 2007 by Mass Insight Education. "Accounting for this turbulence in academic and organizational design, as well as in operations and training, is a prerequisite to successful schools."

SCHOOL RISK LOAD

For this report, the Center's researchers wanted to know: Does New York City, home to the poorest congressional district in the nation, have a similar set of "truly disadvantaged" schools? Are these the same elementary schools with absenteeism problems and test scores that failed to budge over time? And can policymakers use chronic absenteeism as a way to identify high-poverty schools and to target supports to the young students who need them the most?

1. Philadelphia's Kids Integrated Data System (KIDS) includes data from the School District of Philadelphia, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Human Services and the Office of Supportive Housing. For this study, researchers looked at the following potential academic risks: birth risks, teen mothers, low maternal education, homelessness, maltreatment and lead exposure.

To try to answer these questions, we built a New York City student risk analysis. Using 2009 U.S. Census American Community Survey data aligned to school catchments, Center staff identified the 10 percent of schools with the highest levels of family poverty and male unemployment. This yielded 77 elementary and K to 8 schools serving particularly high-poverty families in neighborhoods already known to be low income.[2] Using Department of Education data, we looked at the statistical effects of transient and homeless students and families receiving government support. We also mapped the number of public housing complexes and homeless shelters in each school's catchment. And we obtained geographic data from the Administration for Children's Services, allowing us to measure the intensity of investigations and foster care placement in the area each school was serving. We then layered on numbers that gave us a picture of the health and climate of each school, including principal turnover, teacher turnover, student mobility, suspensions and analysis from the Department of Education's Learning Environment Surveys.

With input from these sources, we created a set of indicators to calculate a school's "total risk load." (See box on the right.) From this analysis, we saw the following:

- In many schools, chronic absenteeism is virulent and ongoing. Nearly 130 of the 748 elementary and K to 8 schools we studied struggle with "persistent chronic absenteeism" (defined as, on average, one-third or more of students having been chronically absent over the last five years). There are 33 schools where the number of chronically absent students has been, on average, above 40 percent over the past five years.

- The measure of persistent chronic absenteeism is useful for spotting schools that may be struggling with issues associated with deep poverty, such as student transience and homelessness or various health, family and mental health issues. Schools with persistent chronic absenteeism had significantly higher rates of students with families in temporary housing and/or accepting some form of welfare benefits. These schools were far more likely to have institutions associated with high poverty—including homeless shelters and public housing complexes—in their catchment. These schools also had significantly higher numbers of Administration for Children's Services investigations and placements in the catchment they served. (See "Schools with Persistent Chronic Absenteeism Are Challenged," page 16.)

- Persistent chronic absenteeism is a more useful school-level poverty indicator than others available, including free lunch or even U.S. Census measures like the level of family poverty or unemployment in a school's catchment. The absenteeism number is a clear signal that schools have not been able to get a handle on the student- or family-related issues that may be keeping their kids from attending regularly. Chronic absenteeism can also be managed and improved relatively easily, giving high-poverty schools a useful stepping-stone metric as they work toward longer-term improvements around teaching quality, school climate and test scores.

- Some schools are dealing with a tremendously high load of risks—both community and family risks, like homelessness and child maltreatment, and school-level risks, like high suspension rates

MEASURING A SCHOOL'S TOTAL RISK LOAD: THE 18 FACTORS

The fact that family and neighborhood poverty can have an adverse effect on school performance is well known. But typical measures, like free and reduced lunch or even community poverty data, fail to capture the volume and nature of the challenges that many schools in New York City face.

To dig deeper, the Center looked at a variety of neighborhood and school-level risk factors commonly mentioned in the academic literature. We matched up school catchment zones with their respective census tracts and analyzed responses from the 2007-2010 American Community Survey, internal data from the NYC Administration for Children's Services, and publicly available data from the Department for Homeless Service and the NYC Housing Authority. We layered in data from the city and state education departments on students, teachers and school climate. We found that the following 18 variables were strong predictors of both Common Core test scores and chronic absenteeism.

SCHOOL FACTORS:

1. Students eligible for free lunch (2012-13)
2. Students known to be in temporary housing (2012-13)
3. Students eligible for welfare benefits from the Human Resources Administration (2012-13)
4. Special education students (2012-13)
5. Black or Hispanic students (2012-13)
6. Principal turnover (2008-2013)
7. Teacher turnover (2011-12)
8. Student turnover (2010-11)
9. Student suspensions (2011-12)
10. Safety score on the Learning Environment Survey (2012-13)
11. Engagement score on the Learning Environment Survey (2012-13)

NEIGHBORHOOD FACTORS:

12. Involvement with the Administration for Children's Services (2010)
13. Poverty rate (2010)
14. Adult education levels (2010)
15. Professional employment (2010)
16. Male unemployment (2010)
17. Presence of public housing in a school's catchment (2011)
18. Presence of a homeless shelter in a school's catchment (2011)

2. There are unzoned elementary and K to 8 schools in New York City that accept students outside a defined catchment area. Those schools were excluded from this analysis because we had no way of connecting U.S. Census data to the school's students.

HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS WITH VERY DIFFERENT NUMBERS

Researchers from the Center for New York City Affairs worked closely with educators in 13 of New York City's lowest-income schools to better understand the relationship between poverty and educational outcomes like chronic absenteeism and test scores. We found that the relationship is complicated and no single set of risk factors can predict academic success or failure. We found to some extent, educators can overcome these issues in the lives of their students. PS 63 Author's Academy in the South Bronx posted solid scores on the new Common Core exams, for example, despite dense poverty in the neighborhood and high numbers in risk factors such as students in temporary housing and student turnover. And PS 61 Francisco Oller—a Children's Aid Society community school in the South Bronx—had the lowest absenteeism rates in this group in the face of major poverty challenges. These schools are anomalies though. Center researchers found that the overall load of risks correlates closely with the attendance and test score variation seen in high-poverty schools citywide.

ATTENDANCE AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FOR THE CENTER FOR NYC AFFAIRS' CASE STUDY SCHOOLS: 2008-2013

DISTRICT	SCHOOL NAME	AVERAGE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM 2008-2013	PASSING COMMON CORE ELA EXAM 2012-2013	PASSING COMMON CORE MATH EXAM 2012-2013	POVERTY RATE IN ZONE 2010	AVERAGE YEARS OF EDUCATION IN ZONE 2010	PERCENT OF ADULT PROFESSIONALS IN ZONE 2010
12	PS 92 BRONX	46%	5%	4%	82%	11.4	17%
08	PS 140 THE EAGLE SCHOOL	42%	8%	11%	83%	10.9	20%
16	PS 335 GRANVILLE T WOODS	39%	11%	10%	99%	11.1	15%
13	PS 67 CHARLES A DORSEY	39%	7%	7%	97%	11.5	20%
09	PS 11 HIGHBRIDGE	33%	14%	12%	85%	11.3	15%
05	PS 161 PEDRO ALBIZU CAMPOS	31%	12%	15%	95%	11.4	19%
09	PS 55 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN	30%	3%	9%	99%	9.5	8%
19	PS 328 PHYLLIS WHEATLEY	30%	3%	6%	99%	11.2	16%
09	PS 63 AUTHOR'S ACADEMY	28%	26%	21%	96%	11.2	20%
19	PS 273 WORTMAN	26%	12%	14%	85%	8.3	19%
28	PS 48 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH	26%	14%	11%	90%	12.2	22%
04	PS 171 PATRICK HENRY	23%	36%	41%	89%	12.2	33%
12	PS 61 FRANCISCO OLLER	20%	11%	18%	89%	10.7	15%

SOURCE: *See www.centernyc.org for a full explanation of the Center's data sources and methodology. The website also provides data for all 18 risk factors. Some were omitted here due to space constraints.*

and teacher turnover. Center researchers considered 18 factors in this risk analysis. Of the 128 schools elementary and K to 8 schools with persistent chronic absenteeism rates above 33 percent, 59 schools had 14 or more risk factors at play and 62 were dealing at least 10 risk factors. A typical example was PS 65 Mother Hale Academy, located in the South Bronx. Chronic absenteeism rates were consistently above 40 percent, hitting a stunning high of 51 percent in 2010–11. According to education department data, nearly 30 percent of the school's students were in temporary housing in 2012–13 with 80 percent of its families receiving some form of government aid. While the principal has remained with the school since taking over in 2010 and test scores are on par with District 7's (notoriously low) results, it's hard to see how the tiny school will be able to improve while continually losing 30 to 40 percent of its teachers each year. Other schools in this group were similar, but Mother Hale Academy may well be a poster child for New York City's own "truly disadvantaged" schools. (See "Chronic Absenteeism Reflects Community- and School-Level Risks," page 20.)

STUDENTS' LIVES IN DEEP POVERTY

The Center's researchers wanted to see firsthand how schools serving very low-income students were doing and how community poverty can make a difference in the daily life of a school. Using 2009 U.S. Census data aligned to school catchments, Center staff identified the 10 percent of New York City schools with the highest levels of family poverty and male unemployment. This yielded 77 elementary and K to 8 schools.

To be clear, these schools were chosen based on their U.S. Census numbers alone—not on our student risk load analysis that would come later. This turned out to be a useful distinction because it allowed us to compare schools with nearly identical family poverty numbers but very different community and school risks.

PERCENT OF UNEMPLOYED MALES IN ZONE 2010	PUBLIC HOUSING IN ZONE 2011	HOMELESS SHELTER IN ZONE 2011	STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE LUNCH 2012-2013	STUDENTS IN TEMP HOUSING 2012-2013	STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR HRA BENEFITS 2012-2013	TEACHER TURNOVER 2011-2012	STUDENT TURNOVER 2010-2011	TOTAL NUMBER OF RISKS
36%	NO	YES	87%	23%	78%	21%	30%	16
46%	YES	YES	88%	18%	73%	7%	19%	14
40%	YES	NO	88%	17%	70%	21%	33%	16
63%	YES	YES	97%	16%	81%	6%	7%	15
40%	NO	YES	88%	21%	76%	4%	12%	12
38%	YES	NO	84%	19%	73%	17%	36%	16
51%	YES	NO	92%	14%	77%	2%	9%	12
53%	YES	YES	97%	25%	79%	10%	13%	14
35%	YES	NO	87%	20%	75%	10%	30%	13
47%	YES	NO	72%	12%	60%	6%	9%	12
40%	YES	NO	75%	12%	60%	16%	23%	16
43%	YES	NO	79%	8%	55%	9%	12%	9
36%	NO	NO	83%	12%	69%	15%	11%	11

Our researchers contacted principals in these 77 schools, and 13 agreed to participate in the study, offering their time and access to their staff. We conducted visits over the 2011–12 school year and followed up with check-in interviews. Researchers also gathered other data for local poverty and school outcome to better understand each neighborhood's educational challenges. Finally, we spoke with dozens of other professionals, including educators in other high-poverty schools, social service and poverty experts, staff from the Department of Education and leaders of Mayor Bloomberg's absenteeism initiative, as well as city officials and nonprofit practitioners working on health, homelessness and poverty issues.

As we began our work, we saw almost immediately that poverty alone is not destiny. Although each school was serving students living among some of the highest levels of poverty in New York City, the similarities ended there. Students at two schools have been doing well, posting impressive numbers for both academics and attendance, and the schools are getting good grades for management in the city's accountability systems. Another six schools were either holding steady or on an upswing, posting numbers similar to other low-income schools citywide.

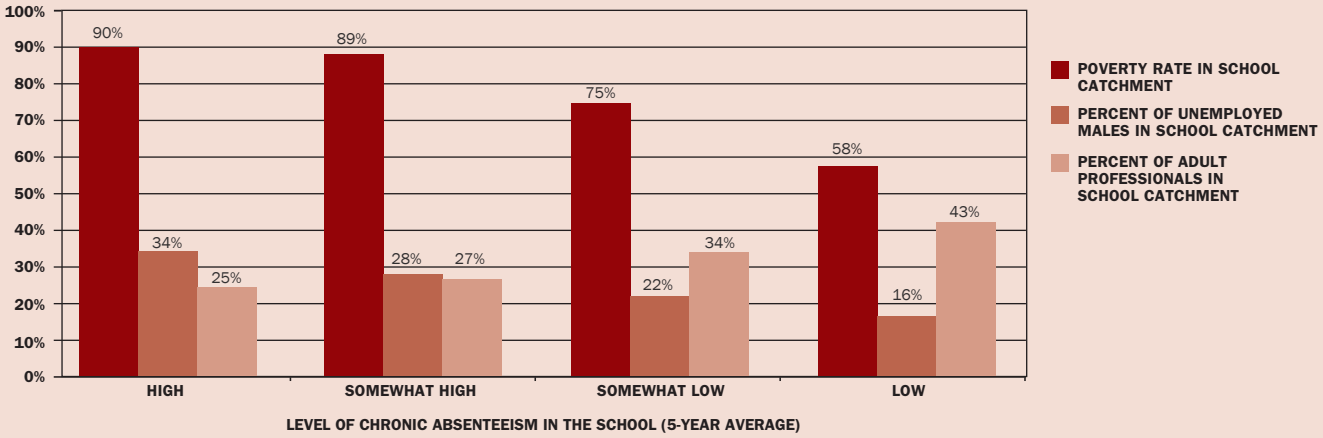
But six of our case study schools were clearly struggling with academic outcomes, including average pass rates of 10 percent or less on the new Common Core–aligned exams in 2013. Running the risk numbers, we found these schools tended to have more risk factors than the other seven. There were exceptions at both ends: PS 63 Author's Academy in the South Bronx had a very high risk load with solid academic numbers and PS 273 Wortman in East New York had fewer risks and much lower test scores. The effects of their being in very low-income communities were evident in all of the schools. All schools had at least nine risk factors and most were above 13 factors. And all but four of the schools had average pass rates of 13 percent or below on the 2013 Common Core tests. (See "High Poverty Schools with Very Different Numbers" for a list of the participating schools and their statistics, page 14.)

SCHOOLS WITH PERSISTENT CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM ARE CHALLENGED WITH FAR GREATER COMMUNITY- AND SCHOOL-LEVEL RISKS

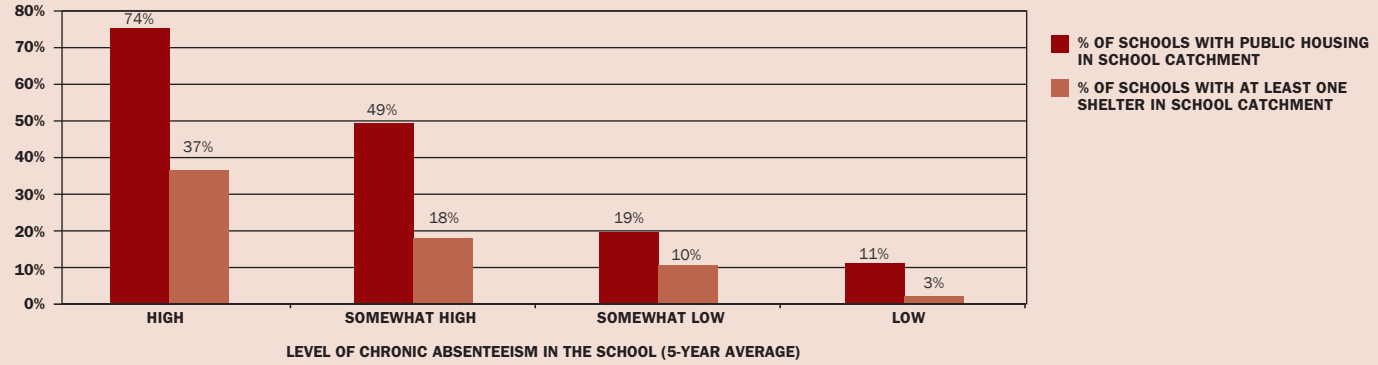
A majority of schools in New York City serve low-income students, but the challenges of poverty vary greatly among schools. Absenteeism can stem from poverty-related issues: Poor health care or homelessness can keep kids out of school, as can issues that can spiral out of control at schools dealing with deep poverty, like bullying or teachers who are perceived as hostile. The Center explored the question of how closely absenteeism is linked to issues like these by looking at 18 factors in a "risk load" analysis. We found that attendance is closely tied to schools that struggle with multiple poverty-related risks, making chronic absenteeism a potentially useful proxy for policymakers who want to get help to schools that need it most.

HIGH: SCHOOLS WHERE 33% OR MORE OF STUDENTS ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT (N=128)
SOMEWHAT HIGH: SCHOOLS WHERE 22-32% OF STUDENTS ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT (N=218)
SOMEWHAT LOW: SCHOOLS WHERE 11-21% OF STUDENTS ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT (N=273)
LOW: SCHOOLS WHERE 0-10% OF STUDENTS ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT (N=129)

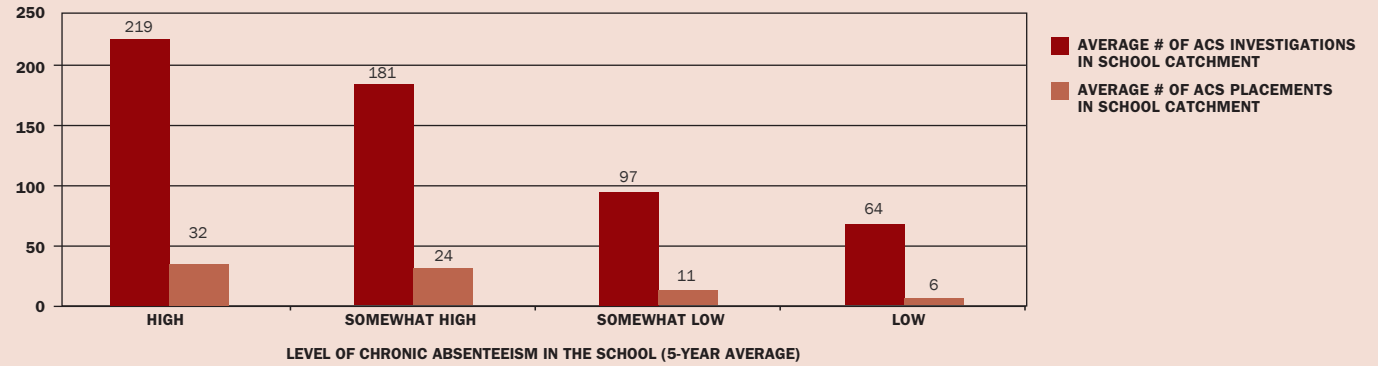
NEIGHBORHOOD EMPLOYMENT LEVELS AND POVERTY



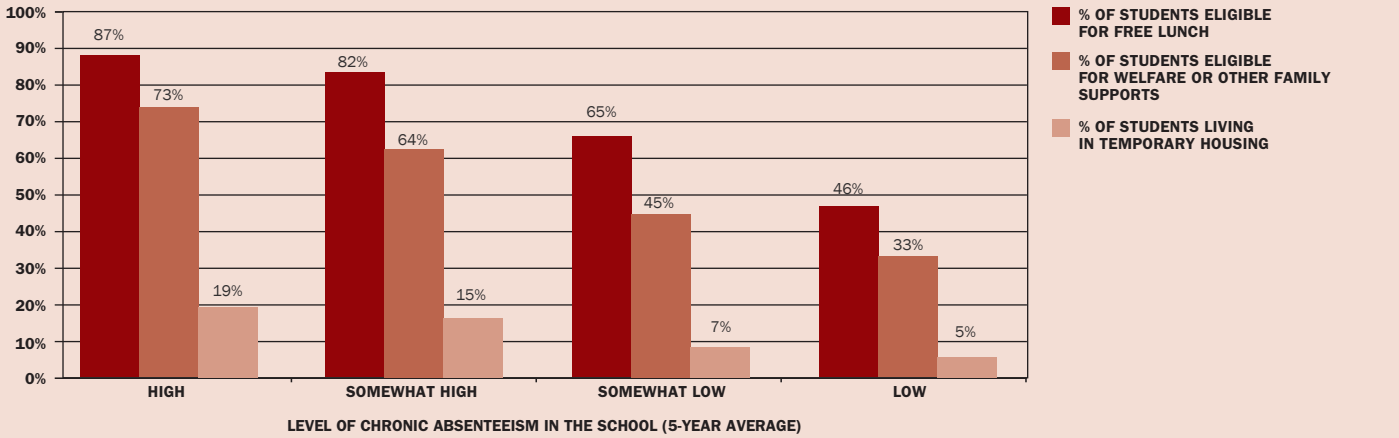
NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING STABILITY



NEIGHBORHOOD INVOLVEMENT WITH ACS

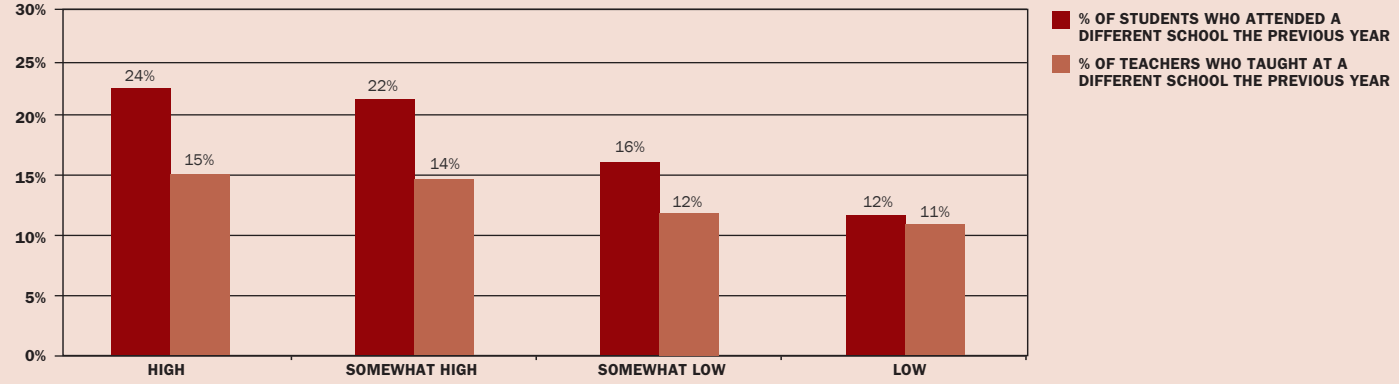


STUDENT ECONOMIC NEED



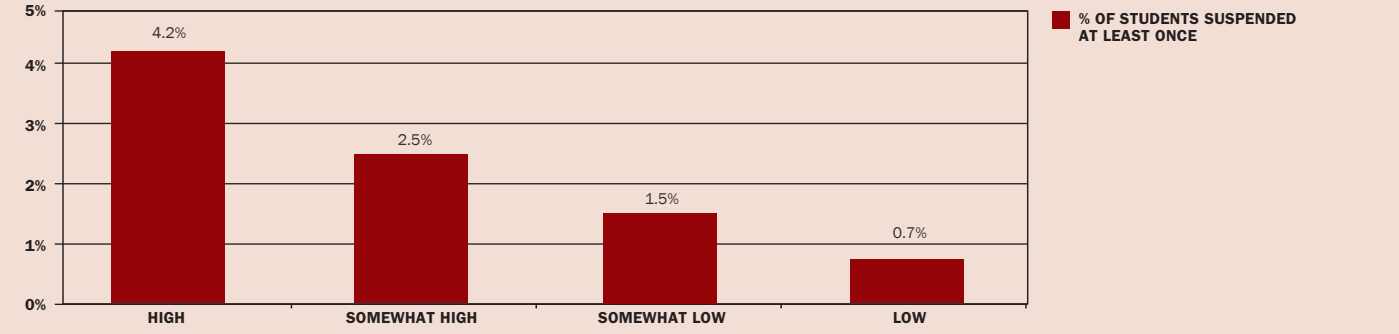
LEVEL OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN THE SCHOOL (5-YEAR AVERAGE)

STUDENT AND TEACHER TURNOVER



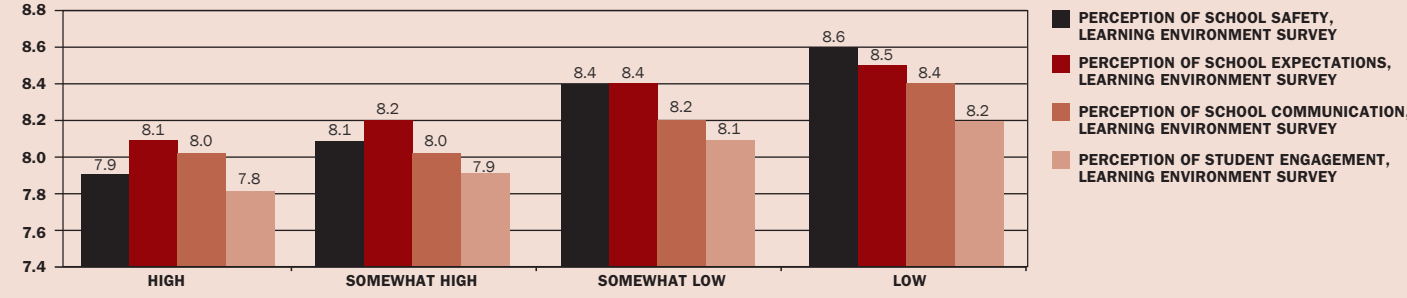
LEVEL OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN THE SCHOOL (5-YEAR AVERAGE)

STUDENT SUSPENSIONS



LEVEL OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN THE SCHOOL (5-YEAR AVERAGE)

SATISFACTION WITH SCHOOL CLIMATE AND SAFETY



LEVEL OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN THE SCHOOL (5-YEAR AVERAGE)

SOURCE: *Datasets provided by the New York City Department of Education (2008-09 to 2012-13), the New York State Education Department (2011-12), the Administration for Children Services (2010) and the U.S. Census (2007 to 2010). Risk load analysis conducted by the Center for New York City Affairs. Includes 748 elementary and K-8 schools. Analysis excludes charter schools, schools in districts 75 and 79 and schools with insufficient data. See page 13 for more detail on the data and www.centernyc.org for technical notes.*

Among the principals we spoke with, nearly all noted that the recession that followed the global crisis in 2008 had not abated for their students' families.

None of the 13 principals in these schools complained about the children and families they were serving. Across the board, these school leaders declared they were game for the challenge they signed up for—at least initially when we interviewed them in 2011. But we did detect more weariness among some of our leaders when we circled back to talk in the fall of 2014. Two of the principals, both from the six struggling schools mentioned above, had been removed. Two others retired or left and could not be tracked down.

PS 140 Eagle School in the Morrisania section of the South Bronx is one of the five schools in our group struggling to make headway academically. The school shoulders 14 of the 18 risk factors, including high unemployment and high student mobility. The neighborhood poverty rate is nearly 85 percent and almost 18 percent of the school's students are in temporary housing. Principal Paul Cannon says his children do not really know what poverty means. They don't feel deprived, at least not yet. Visiting his school, this does seem clear. The children giggle and eagerly participate in class, hands up and answers tumbling out when Cannon quizzes them on a vocabulary word or a science term. They clearly love their principal. Whole lines of children squeal and give him two thumbs up as they pass in the hallway going to lunch or back to class.

But there are some dark numbers underneath that cheer. Some 40 percent of Cannon's students are chronically absent, year after year, and PS 140's academic progress is stalling. Despite an eagerness to experiment with teaching approaches that foster more student-teacher attachment and explicitly encourage more critical thinking, the school has been unable to bump up its test scores or improve its standing in the eyes of the city. In 2013, PS 140 got its third "C" in a row on the former Mayor Bloomberg's high-stakes Progress Report, with fewer than 10 percent of students passing the tough new Common Core–aligned tests when averaged over both subjects. "We are basically flatlining," Cannon said recently, sounding uncharacteristically weary. "We're not getting any better or any worse."

Among those we spoke with, nearly all noted that the recession that followed the global financial crisis in 2008 had not abated for their students' families, with many men still clearly out of work and mothers under great stress or unavailable to help their kids. "My community is so far behind," says Pamela Price Haynes, a veteran principal at PS 161 Pedro Albizu Campos in Harlem. Her families are mostly Hispanic and traditional. "The women stay at home. The men are not working anymore. The menial work is just not there," she says. "It's very painful to see."

Principals report that the situation is even more difficult in communities that have struggled with joblessness for a generation or more, a fact of life in certain parts of the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn. In our recent interviews, we heard about many cases where students disappear over a weekend and fail to return, leaving the school staff to try to figure out whether the child is on vacation, living with relatives, in a new home—or in an institution somewhere. "A kid won't show up Monday and by Friday, all of a sudden, I'll find out that a transferral has taken place," says Benjamin Basile, principal of MS 301 in Morrisania in an interview in 2011. "He may be in Rikers, in the hospital, in the psych ward. That's very consistent with what happens every single day in my tiny population of 322 children," he adds, recalling one bad weekend when more than 10 of his students were arrested. "And these are middle school kids!"

Luis Torres, principal of PS 55 Benjamin Franklin in Morrisania, says that students from the housing projects that surround his school come with a "backpack" of personal and emotional issues that his teachers must confront. The Center's U.S. Census analysis showed Torres was working with students experiencing some of the highest poverty and lowest social capital scores in the city. No matter what your strategy, that is tough to work against, Torres says. "You can't teach a kid who is hungry or sleep deprived," he offers. "We have one child who eats pencils all the way to the lead. Another child eats gum off the floor. We see sexual abuse, emotional abuse and many of our students have foster parents." Torres hasn't been able to find a solution for his relentlessly low test scores—only 3 percent of his

students passed the 2013 Common Core ELA exam and 9 percent passed math. "It creates an unfair perception," Torres says. "It really drains you."

For years, Varleton "Mac" McDonald led the Maverick Education Partnership, a Department of Education school support network serving some of the city's highest-poverty schools (including several of the 77 we identified) until he took over the education department's Parent Academy in 2012. He hosted a freewheeling discussion with some of the Maverick network principals and Center researchers in 2011. The group reeled off dozens of reasons students in their neighborhoods may not attend school regularly or succeed academically. At the top of their list were health and mental health problems, ranging from asthma and other illnesses to emotional issues that often require an inordinate amount of adult attention during the school day. Homelessness was also a big issue. Many children lived in nearby shelters or were in doubled-up situations with other families. Many were also responsible for caring for their siblings and getting them to school, an issue that led to constant lateness for older students and absences when there is no one home to take care of their pre-school brothers and sisters. Children were also often hungry, the principals said. Some had structured their school days and after-school programs so that children who needed food could eat three times each day, ideally going home with extra food in their backpacks.

"DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY"

Schools like Morrisania's PS 140, PS 55 and MS 301 present Mayor Bill de Blasio with one of his biggest educational challenges: What to do about high poverty and how to distinguish and assist those schools serving more stable low-income families and those serving large numbers of families struggling with transience, homelessness, child welfare issues, child care needs, or chronic health or mental health issues. Former mayor Michael Bloomberg insisted that educators not use poverty as an excuse for their students' poor academic performance, and he pushed schools to find ways to respond to their students' challenges. Nonetheless, many schools, even those with dedicated leaders like Cannon, have flatlined or spiraled downward.

Professor Balfanz at Johns Hopkins University observes that schools with very low-income students rarely receive the attention and credit they deserve, here in New York City or anywhere in the United States. "I like to talk about the 'degree of educational difficulty,'" he says. "I use the Olympic diving example. You can do a perfect swan dive off the high board, but no matter how beautiful and flawless it is, it will get beat by a triple back flip, even if there are a few errors in it. People recognize it is much harder to do a triple back flip than the perfect swan dive.

"If you are in an affluent neighborhood, you can essentially turn on the lights and the kids will learn. That is a swan dive. If all of your kids are agency involved, if they are chronically absent, if they are in the middle of gang warfare, that's a triple back flip. Here, we do not resource, fund or hold schools accountable based on the degree of difficulty."

In Morrisania, MS 301's Basile contends that policymakers need to recognize that the city's many low-income schools can be very different from each other. "Communities pick up the slack collectively when there is a socioeconomic base that they can stand on. But here in Morrisania, where there is no base—where it's just shifting sand—the school has to provide that," he says. For students to succeed, schools in these neighborhoods should be given the money and capacity to provide much more home and family help for their children, he argues. "At the end of the day, this city is going to have to accept the fact that this kind of poverty exists. " ✶

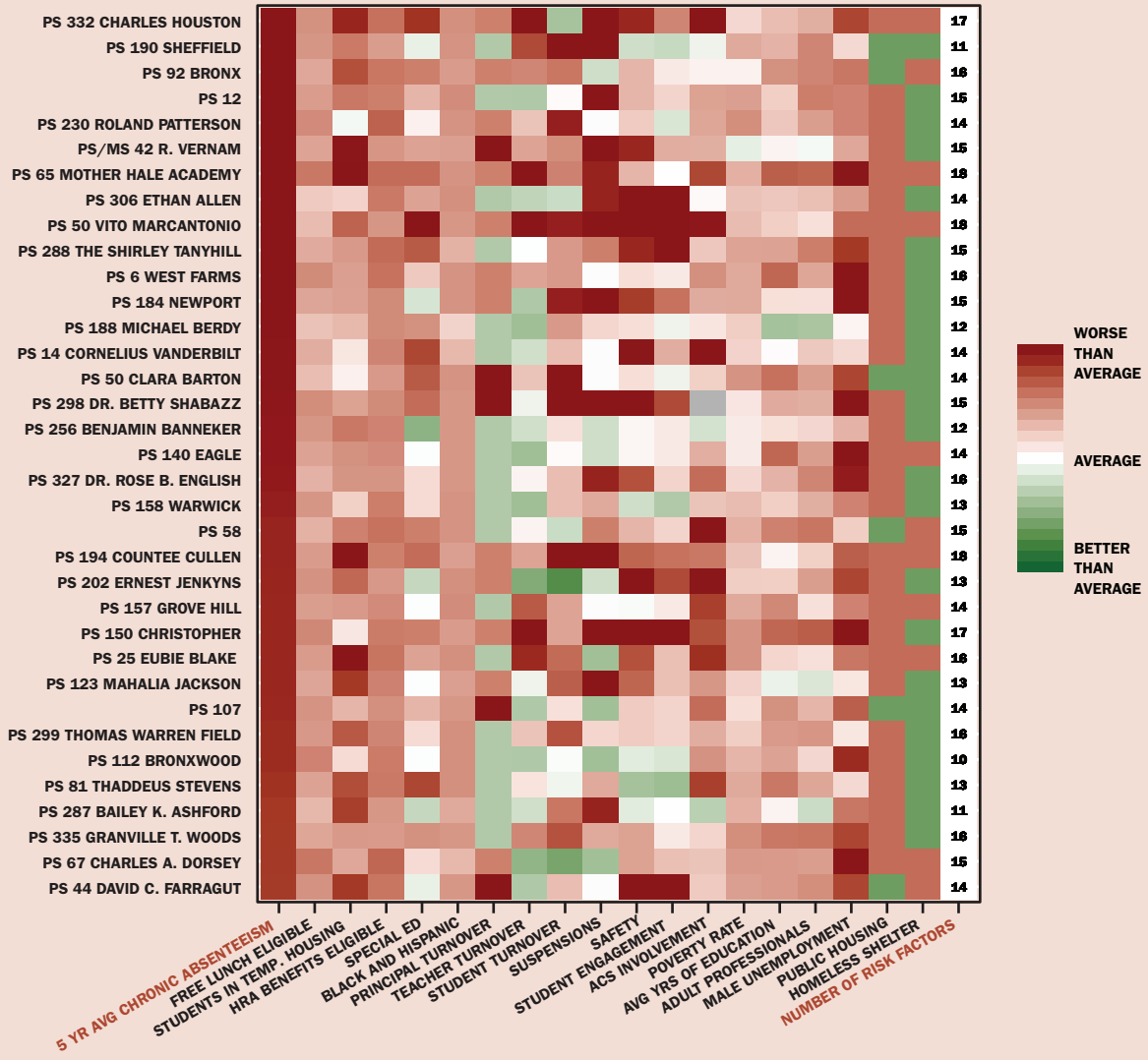
"We do not resource, fund or hold schools accountable based on the degree of difficulty."

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM REFLECTS THE COMMUNITY- AND SCHOOL-LEVEL RISKS

THE TYPE AND NUMBER OF RISKS SHIFT FROM SCHOOL TO SCHOOL, REQUIRING DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO ABSENTEEISM AND SCHOOL SUPPORT

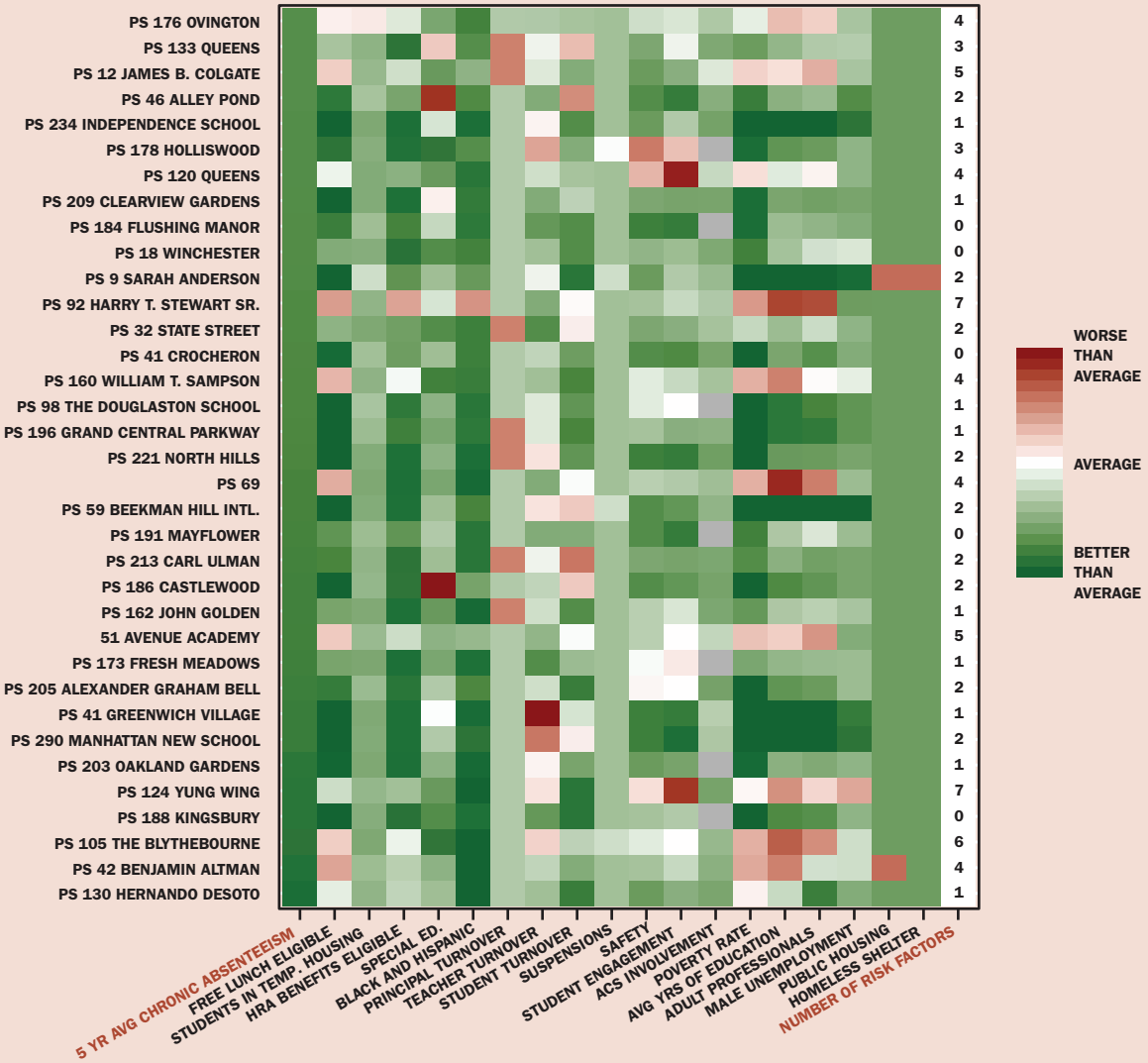
New York City is embarking on a major expansion of community schools with the goal of helping schools in low-income neighborhoods deal with poverty-related issues that can hold students back. Unfortunately, the city is filled with high-poverty schools, so it is important to understand which may need the most help—and what kind of help would be most useful. The Center for New York City Affairs has created a risk load tool that brings together data for 18 community and school factors that can have an impact on students' education, from teacher turnover to the number of students who are homeless. Our analysis shows that chronic absenteeism is closely related to the risk load of a school. The charts below show the schools with the city's highest and lowest levels of persistent chronic absenteeism. The connection between chronic absenteeism and the characteristics of deep poverty are clear. But as important: The risk load and risk profiles vary greatly from school to school, even among schools with similar simple poverty-level measures. City efforts to improve support to high-poverty schools should be assigned and designed with a school's risk load and risk profile in mind.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH THE HIGHEST CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES: COMMUNITY- AND SCHOOL-LEVEL RISK LOAD



NOTE: *The chart above should be viewed in color. See www.centernyc.org if you have a black and white printed copy.*

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH THE LOWEST CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES: COMMUNITY- AND SCHOOL-LEVEL RISK LOAD



SOURCE: *Datasets provided by the New York City Department of Education (2008-09 to 2012-13), the New York State Education Department (2010-12), the Administration for Children Services (2010) and the U.S. Census (2007 to 2010). Risk load analysis conducted by the Center for New York City Affairs. Includes 748 elementary and K-8 schools. Analysis excludes charter schools, schools in districts 75 and 79 and schools with insufficient data. See page 13 for more detail on the data and www.centernyc.org for technical notes and a chart featuring all the schools in the dataset.*

Back to School

Tackling chronic absenteeism isn't easy, but with the right tools and a lot of attention, it can be done.

When Patricia Mitchell became principal of PS 48 Wordsworth in 2007, she discovered that her small elementary school in Jamaica, Queens, had one of the highest chronic absenteeism rates in the city. Serving a largely African American and Hispanic community with a lot of young, single parents, PS 48 had one-third of its students missing at least one in every 10 days of school that year. That attendance number was worse than many schools in the Bronx and Central Brooklyn—and almost unheard of in relatively well-off Queens.

Mitchell was taking over a school that had cycled through four leaders over the prior seven years. Her building at the time was run-down; many teachers seemed demoralized or lethargic. She looked at the poor attenders and wondered if those students and their families were sending her a signal about the school. "At that time, I didn't know my kids," she says.

Now seven years later, PS 48 has climbed academically from the bottom 10 percent of the city to a respectable place in the middle of the pack, ascending from the 9th percentile in 2010–11 to the 48th percentile in 2012–13. It's even passed by other schools with similar demographics that stumbled badly in the first year of the new Common Core–aligned tests.

Mitchell's team made notable progress on attendance over those years, mostly by focusing on a roster of kids they knew were at risk of missing school. At the end of the 2011 school year, Mitchell had drawn up a list of more than 160 students who missed 20 days or more. By February of the following school year, only 26 kids remained on her watch list. The rest had solid, and occasionally even perfect, attendance. "You have to spend a lot of time on this," Mitchell says. "You can have the best lessons in the world, but if the students don't come, they can't learn."

Absenteeism has been overlooked by educators and policymakers—an irony given how much effort goes into improving schooling on the assumption students are actually attending regularly.

Absenteeism has historically been overlooked by educators and policymakers—an irony given how much effort goes into improving schooling on the assumption that students are actually attending regularly. Researchers tend to view attendance as fixed student trait, such as race or family income: useful for predicting how a child might do academically but not seen as a possible tool for improving schools, like addressing teacher effectiveness or changing district structure. School leaders, of course, have always been aware of student attendance, but tracking it was viewed mostly as paperwork. "Many principals have traditionally looked at attendance as an operational issue, like doing their budget," says Kim Suttell, who runs the New York City Department of Education's attendance programs.

Suttell is among a growing group of administrators who would like to see attendance take a more prominent role in school accountability. She argues that attendance is a particularly important piece of data for principals to track and analyze. If too many students miss too much school, at some point the entire school will suffer. "How many chronically absent students can a school have and still maintain momentum?" she asks.

As Mitchell discovered, absenteeism has been shown to be a strong predictor of academic success, both for individual students and the school. Our researchers at the Center for New York City Affairs analyzed student data on New York City's elementary and K to 8 students over three academic years, from 2010–11 to 2012–13, looking at absenteeism and test scores. A school's rate of chronic absenteeism was more useful for predicting a school's test scores than other common measures, including the school's percentage of students in special education, English language learners or students receiving free lunch.

The Center's analysis also suggests that absenteeism can have a substantial effect on the school as a whole. On average, the number of students passing the New York State tests goes down by 1.3 percent for every percentage point increase in chronic absenteeism. In other words, if a school has 10 percent more chonically absent students than another similar school, it is statistically likely to have 13 perent fewer students who pass the annual achievement tests (scoring a Level 3 or better).

We found this pattern to be consistent over three years, before and after New York State's tougher Common Core–aligned tests were introduced. It provides some evidence that the presence of chronic absenteeism has a broader effect on schools than the obvious academic harm that students themselves may experience. (See "Chronic Absenteeism Rates Have a Strong Pull on Test Scores," page 28.) "If you have a classroom where one-third or one-fourth of the kids are missing several weeks of school, there is no way that is not going to have a negative effect on the achievement of that class," says Robert Balfanz, a professor at Johns Hopkins School of Education and one of the field's leading researchers.

Digging into poor attendance can be used to dramatically improve a student's school experience. "There is no one thing that is 'attendance,'" says Suttell. "Is it transportation? Is it health? Is it housing? Is it school climate? Is it being bullied? Is it academic performance?"

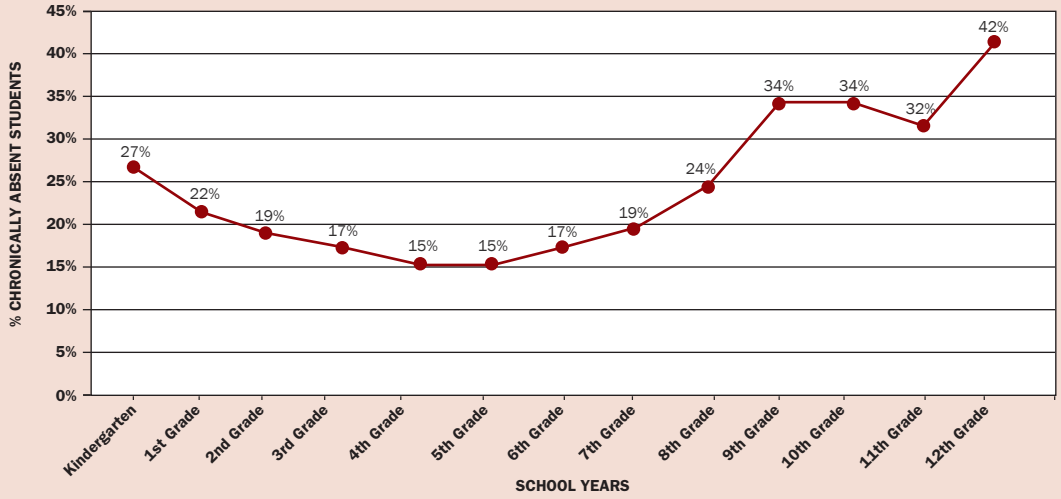
Principals should take this detective work seriously, she says. It is a good way to identify students who are at risk academically. Also, finding out *why* students don't come to school regularly in the elementary years can help avert problems down the road. Too often, Suttell says, school staffers call parents to let them know about their child's absenteeism and leave it at that. Principals could be using this opportunity to ask parents what kind of help their child might need to get to school regularly and succeed. "I think schools make the calls because they have to. It is in the regulations. But the intent is to connect with the family—to learn the reasons for the absence—not just fulfill an obligation."

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM SHIFTS OVER TIME

YOUNG CHILDREN AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS MISS THE MOST SCHOOL

Attendance changes as students move through their school years. In elementary school, chronic absenteeism is highest in the early years, due to illness and the fact that children are dependent on their parents to get to school. Bad attendance drops in late elementary school and early middle school but starts climbing again in 7th and 8th grade as students begin to skip school or are needed as babysitters. Chronic absenteeism jumps in high school, as students take advantage of the lighter supervision or struggle with other issues that keep them from coming regularly. More than one-third of high school students are chronically absent with more than 40 percent failing to attend regularly by the time they reach their senior year.

K-12 CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM (2012-13)



SOURCE: *New York City Department of Education: Individual student attendance data, 2012-13. Analysis excludes charter schools, schools in districts 75 and 79 and schools with insufficient data.*

HOW ABSENTEEISM BREAKS DOWN: FROM LOW TO HIGH

In focusing on chronic absenteeism, it's important to remember that most students in New York City do go to school regularly. About half of New York City's students are solid attenders. Another quarter are not considered high-risk. And for many students who miss too much school in their elementary years, experience and research has shown that relatively simple interventions can make a big difference. Studies in other districts, and here in New York, have shown that some 50 percent of chronically absent elementary students can be easily reached with attention from a caring adult or mentor. Attendance can improve rapidly when school staffers take the time to let students and their families know that the children are genuinely missed.

CHRONIC AND SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM: NEW YORK CITY CITYWIDE TOTALS: SCHOOL YEAR 2012-13

GRADE	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS	LOW ABSENTEEISM 0 TO 9 ABSENCES		MODERATE ABSENTEEISM 10 TO 17 ABSENCES	
		NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
K TO 5TH	449,395	240,880	53.6%	121,402	27.0%
6TH TO 8TH	211,675	117,101	55.3%	52,346	24.7%
9TH TO 12TH	305,394	133,343	43.7%	64,316	21.1%
ALL GRADE CITYWIDE TOTALS	**966,464**	**491,324**	**50.8%**	**238,064**	**24.6%**

SOURCE: *New York City Department of Education: Individual student attendance data, 2012-13. Analysis excludes charter schools, schools in districts 75 and 79 and schools with insufficient data.*

Despite the importance of chronic absenteeism, it's too easy for school staff to miss the problem entirely. Elementary school students may be missing a scattered two or three days a month, which, on any given day, doesn't feel like a lot. And for at-risk students who *are* on the principal's radar, "there is this idea that if you got the kids to come to school more, it still wouldn't matter," Balfanz says. Educators need to be convinced that this is a problem worthy of their limited time, he says. "People have not really understood the magnitude of the issue."

But things have begun to change, in part because school districts are learning to monitor absenteeism more precisely. Most, including New York City, still use a figure called "average daily attendance" to monitor how well a school is keeping absenteeism under control. This figure allows administrators to see what percentage of their students are present on any given day, but offers no information on which students—or how many students—are racking up too many absences. Another common issue is that a 90 percent attendance may sound OK to people—"90 percent is an A," says one principal—but it is actually an atrocious figure. It means that one in every 10 students was out of school on that particular day.

Students are considered to be "chronically absent" if they have missed 10 percent or more of their school year on any given date. In New York City, the Department of Education produces lists of students each week who have crossed this threshold, or are at risk of crossing it. Officials like Suttell hope principals look at this list each week and figure out a plan for helping these students. The New York City Department of Education also began to publish the percentage of chronically absent children in each school's annual Progress Report in 2013, but the de Blasio administration has redesigned the report for release in the fall of 2014 and early drafts of the new document did not include the chronic absenteeism figure.

Suttell argues that the chronic absenteeism measure provides a far more accurate picture of attendance for both principals and policymakers than the traditional average daily attendance. It is also an important tool for school leaders to use to help their students—if they are aware of it. Unfortunately, too many principals aren't. "I'm happy when a principal calls asking about the school's chronic absenteeism numbers. That shows me that the word is getting out," she says.

Even schools that are in tune with the importance of issues in their students' lives beyond academics can be surprised by chronic absenteeism. Former principal Laverne Nimmons and her student support

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM 18 TO 35 ABSENCES		SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM 36 OR MORE ABSENCES		CHRONIC AND SEVERE CHRONIC
NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	PERCENT
67,842	15.1%	19,271	4.3%	19.4%
30,338	14.3%	11,890	5.6%	19.9%
49,359	16.2%	58,376	19.1%	35.3%
147,539	**15.3%**	**89,537**	**9.3%**	**24.5%**

staff at PS 335 Granville T. Woods in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, took pride in the school's mental health programs and the close relationships they were able to build with their students and families. Yet nearly 40 percent of the school's students had missed more than one in 10 days when we visited in 2012.

PS 335 was among 77 schools identified by the Center for New York City Affairs as serving some of New York City's highest-poverty elementary school students. Principal Nimmons joined 12 other principals in this group who agreed to help Center researchers better understand what chronic absenteeism looks like inside a high-poverty school. (See "Measuring the Weight of Poverty," page 10 for more on this research.)

The staff at PS 335 knew absenteeism was an issue to some degree, given that they were responsible for calling home to the parents of missing students every morning. But when we visited in 2012, they were shocked to see a visual presentation of their students' absenteeism patterns. Center staff presented an Excel spreadsheet displaying the whole school's attendance profile to date for the 2011–12 school year. The visualization allowed viewers to see the absenteeism patterns, week by week, for all the students in the school. White blocks showed days present, red blocks showed days absent. Displayed this way, it was easy to see that large numbers of children were missing random days throughout the month, each absent day showing up like a red bullet hole through their school year. The Center's researchers said the school was fortunate not to have a problem with common issues, like too many kids cutting out around vacations or missing Mondays and Fridays. "No," quipped one of the staffers, "we just have an issue with *everyday* attendance." The room erupted in laughter.

The scene was typical of other conversations Center researchers had with school staff across New York City over the 2011–12 year. Without exception, educators knew attendance was important, but it was hard to actually *see* the problem in their schools, since kids, for the most part, seemed to be showing up. "The way we're looking at the attendance data now, we're going by memory," admitted Nimmons, looking again at the red squares on the Center's chart. "We keep notes and records and stuff like that. But this is much easier for us to look at together. We can see the absences of our students, and talk about why, and what we need to do." (See "A Picture of Chronic Absenteeism at One Brooklyn School," page 27.)

WHAT IT TAKES: ONE SCHOOL'S STORY

Also among the 13 schools that the Center looked at closely was Principal Patricia Mitchell's PS 48 Wordsworth in Jamaica, Queens. Unlike PS 335 in Brooklyn, however, PS 48 was part of a three-year attendance pilot project launched by former mayor Michael Bloomberg. The Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism and School Engagement assigned outside "Success Mentors" to work with children who were having attendance issues and experimented with a variety of citywide initiative to reduce problems associated with big issues like asthma and homelessness. (See "Three Years, Many Lessons," page 34, for more details on the elements and performance of the pilot program.)

When the Center first visited PS 48 in 2011, Mitchell had a substantial team of people meeting weekly on attendance, actively working down that list of 160 kids who had missed too much school the prior year. The team included a friendly mix of administrators along with extra help from Mitchell's school support network. There were also two volunteer Success Mentors, including a former social worker who had a lot of experience working with New York City families.

The Center visited the school several times over the 2011–12 school year and the staff offered us generous access to the staff and volunteers working on chronic absenteeism. The activity of this team during that year offers a useful picture of how one school can drive down absenteeism quickly by simply talking to kids and their families—and focusing on the effort.

Towering above the others was Cleveland Freeman, PS 48's attendance teacher, a position that is half teacher, half cop. As an attendance teacher, Freeman has both a teacher's license and knowledge of the neighborhood, allowing him to make serious-minded home visits to errant parents. (Every school in New York has at least one attendance teacher, but they work for the support networks and almost always split their time between a number of schools.) Freeman sported a bald head and wore a trench coat "like Kojak." He bemusedly reported conversations that ranged from cute to sad. "I have sleep

"AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE" HIDES THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT

To monitor school absenteeism, most principals use the Department of Education's "average daily attendance" number, a measure used nationwide to evaluate attendance for school funding and accountability. Daily attendance measures the percent of students who show up on any given day and "average daily attendance" offers a picture of how well schools do over time. However, the number offers no insight on individual student attendance—and how many students may be at risk of missing too much school. The chronic absenteeism measure reveals how many students have missed 10 percent or more of the school year at any point in that year, giving principals a clear picture of how many students are missing a significant number of days. As the chart below shows, average daily attendance can mask chronic absenteeism in a school.

COMPARING AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE AND CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

SCHOOL	NEIGHBORHOOD	AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE 2012-13	RATE OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM 2012-13
PS 39 Henry Bristow	Park Slope	95%	5%
PS 1 The Bergen	Sunset Park	95%	13%
PS 47 Chris Galas	Rockaway Beach	95%	21%
PS 261 Philip Livingston	Boerum Hill	93%	16%
PS 273 Wortman	East New York	93%	26%
PS 329 Surfside	Coney Island	93%	34%
PS 398 Walter Weaver	Crown Heights	90%	33%
PS 140 The Eagle School	South Bronx	90%	39%
PS 105 The Bay School	Far Rockaway	90%	53%

SOURCE: *New York City Department of Education: Individual student attendance data, 2012-13. Analysis done by the Center for New York City Affairs.*

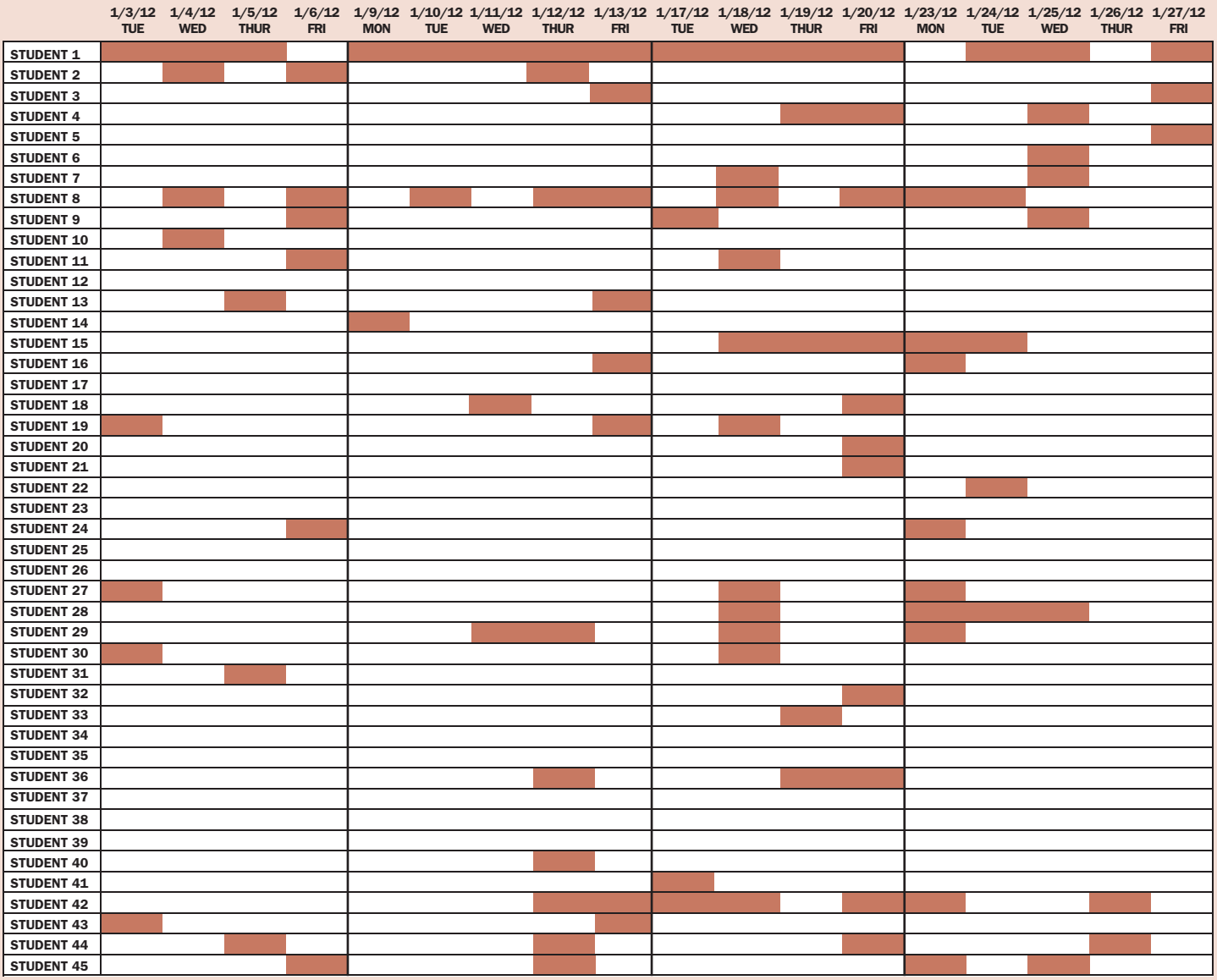
A PICTURE OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AT ONE BROOKLYN SCHOOL

RED BLOCKS VIVIDLY DISPLAY EACH STUDENT'S MISSING DAYS, SHOWING PATTERNS OF ABSENTEEISM FOR STUDENTS AND FOR THE SCHOOL

Researchers at the Center for New York City Affairs created visual "data diagnostics" for several schools with chronic absenteeism that participated in our research. The chart below shows a snapshot of attendance patterns for the students in three classrooms at PS 335 Granville T. Woods in Bedford-Stuyvesant in January 2012. For each student, identified by number to protect his or her privacy, the red blocks represent each day missed over the first three weeks in January. The chart allows educators to see which students have the most absences and how each student tends to miss class. (For example, some students miss certain days of the week; others may miss big blocks of days.) The charts also allow educators to see trends or patterns the school can address.

The staff of PS 335 took pride in the school's mental health programs and their close relationship with students and families, yet they were largely unaware that more than 40 percent of their students were chronically absent. The Center's visual presentation brought the problem to life—and made it simpler for staff to discuss. "This is much easier for us to look at together," the school's principal remarked. "We can see the absences of our students, and talk about why, and what we need to do."

STUDENT ATTENDANCE SNAPSHOT AT PS 335 GRANVILLE T. WOODS IN BROOKLYN JANUARY 3, 2012–JANUARY 27, 2012



SOURCE: *New York City Department of Education: Individual student attendance data, 2011–12. Data visualization created by the Center for New York City Affairs.*

apnea," reported a six-year-old, who had been out five days. "Oh really? *You* know about sleep apnea?" Another child had missed 10 days that year. When Freeman inquired, she said she had "stuff to do." A third student had been forced to move and was commuting to Jamaica from Far Rockaway, taking two long bus trips and then walking every day. "How long does that take you to get to school?" Freeman asked. "I don't really know," the child replied.

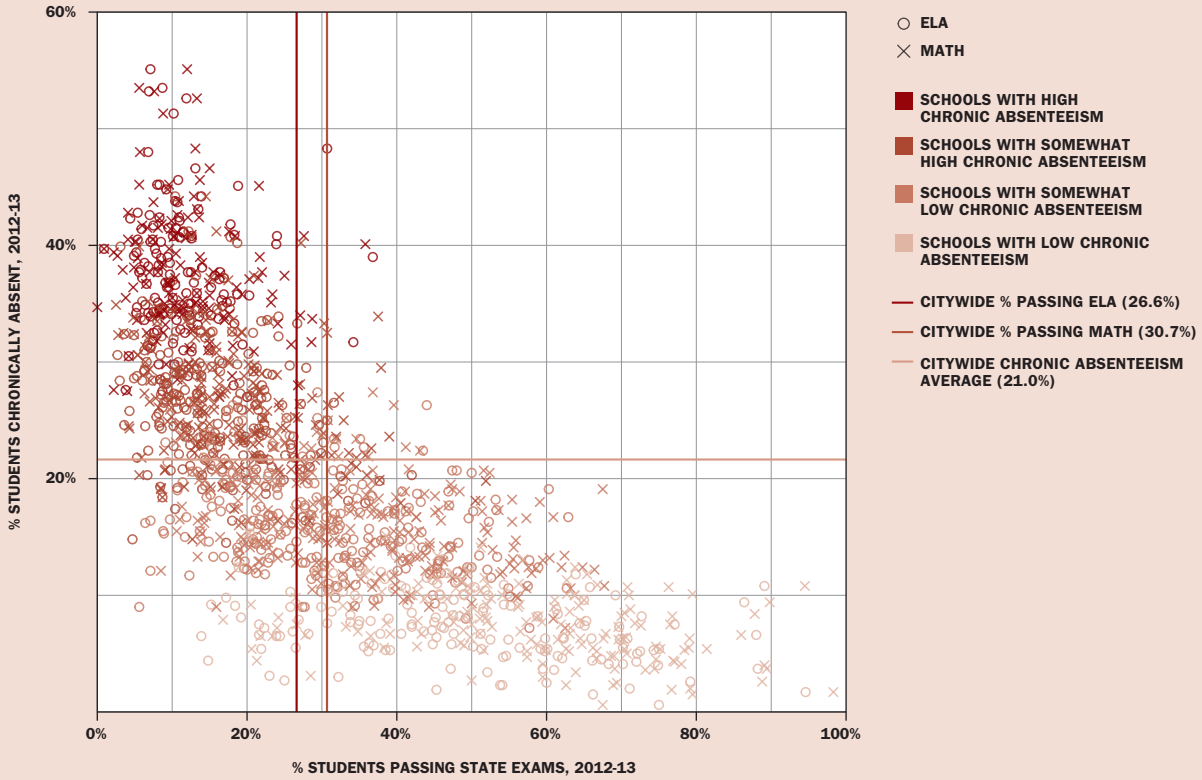
Technically, it was Freeman's job to help deal with the school's chronic absenteeism problems, but he was also responsible for eight other schools and could only provide support for the toughest cases. The driving force behind PS 48's attendance team was Charline Yorke, a paraprofessional who knew the students well and enthusiastically took the position of attendance team leader when Mitchell offered it to her. Yorke worked the school like a no-nonsense mom, a loud and vivid presence in the lunchroom, herding children through their school day.

Yorke kept a binder listing the year-to-date attendance of every child in the school. Adults were assigned to each grade: Vice Principal Vanessa Christensen, for example, followed the at-risk third graders, the social worker volunteer Ray Avila was responsible for the fifth graders while Yorke worked on her list of second graders. Altogether, more than a half dozen adults divvied up the school's

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES HAVE A STRONG PULL ON ELA AND MATH TEST SCORES

Schools that struggle with chronic absenteeism also struggle to prepare their students for New York State's Common Core-aligned ELA and math exams. Unlike the connection between test scores and free lunch rates that have been studied elsewhere, the connection between test scores and the rate of chronic absenteeism follow a pattern that very few schools are able to escape. Only a handful of schools with above-average rates of chronic absenteeism had above-average pass rates on their ELA or math exams—and most scored far below.

DISTRIBUTION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES AND TEST SCORES, 2012-13



SOURCE: *New York City Department of Education: Individual student attendance data, 2008-09 to 2012-13. Analysis done by the Center for New York City Affairs.*

NOTE: *Each school's absenteeism category (high, somewhat high, somewhat low and low) is based on chronic absenteeism rates over five years, from school year 2008-09 to 2012-13. The five-year average reflects each school's true absenteeism profile over time.*

students, doing their best to touch base with their kids at least twice a week and organizing monthly attendance events and prize awards for kids who showed improvement.

Many children posted remarkable improvements in their attendance. One fourth grader had missed 73 days in 2010–11. By the middle of the 2011–12 school year, he had only missed four. Another first grader missed 45 days in 2010–11; by the middle of 2011–12 he had missed only one. Yorke had more than a dozen of these stories to report—including three children who had missed 20 to 30 days in 2010–11 and had become perfect attenders. By the end of the 2011–12 school year, the team had managed to bring PS 48's chronic absenteeism rate down to 18 percent, a big improvement over the 33 percent Mitchell saw when she took over the school and a major coup in any high-poverty community.

There were many explanations for the improvement that year. The winter had been exceptionally mild, giving families a break from weather-related issues and illnesses like asthma attacks. PS 48 also moved to a new school building with sun-streamed classrooms and gleaming hallways, and attendance spiked up almost immediately. The neighborhood was also becoming more working class as new merchant-class immigrants arrived. Because of this demographic roiling though, PS 48 was dealing with a large number of departing families, causing stress on parents who were willing to travel to keep their kids at PS 48. Staff kept in touch with these vulnerable kids and rewarded them both immediately and monthly when they were able to keep their attendance up.

Yorke and other mentors also reached out to families that were overwhelmed. Often a simple conversation could help. One of Yorke's second-grade moms was sick and homebound, making it impossible for her to walk her children to school. "I suggested getting a group together," Yorke said. "If they live around the area, the kids could pair up with one another and come to school as a group." Yorke was not sure if the mom took her advice, but she did know the children's attendance has improved. "They're here," she said.

STRENGTH OF A RELATIONSHIP

PS 48 Wordsworth was a strong performer in Bloomberg's attendance improvement pilot. In the formal evaluation of the initiative, Robert Balfanz and Vaughan Byrnes at Johns Hopkins University found that overall, the pilot schools did better on dealing with absenteeism than schools with similar students that had not participated in the pilot. As important were the findings around academics—and the question of whether students could "recover" academically from bouts of absenteeism. "Students who stop being chronically absent see academic improvements across the board," they wrote.

Bloomberg's pilot showed that school leaders can reduce chronic absenteeism and that much can be done through relatively low-cost strategies, like those that the staff used at PS 48. A broader lesson, Balfanz says, is that the relationship-building work is useful and potentially important. "As any parent knows, you can't solve a problem or change a behavior unless you have a relationship with that person," he says.

Balfanz did caution, though, that improving attendance is just one step to improve a school's performance. Among the schools in his evaluation, the *overall* academic gains were modest, since the number of students exiting chronic absenteeism was a relatively small part of the student population. There were also students who *didn't* see gains by coming to school more frequently. "This isn't magic," he says. "There are going to be some kids who come back but don't pay attention. Or they won't have a good teacher. Just being in school alone isn't going to drive their skills up."

The goal of improving attendance can also stymied when students are missing school due to deeper, more troubling issues. Hedy Chang, founder of Attendance Works and a leading expert on chronic absenteeism, developed a tool for measuring the prevalence and severity of absenteeism in a school. In

Former Mayor Michael Bloomberg's attendance initiative showed that school leaders can reduce chronic absenteeism, and that much can be done with relatively low-cost strategies.

several districts nationally, Chang found that about half of the chronically absent kindergartners and first graders were just hitting the threshold, missing 10 percent of the school year. Change believes these students can be easily reached and helped with more adult attention, whether it be from a mentor, a caring teacher or someone else.

But she says that another 25 percent of the kids appeared to be missing closer to 15 percent of their school year suggesting they may need more emotional support or intervention, say, from the principal or a guidance counselor. The final quarter was, on average, missing two months of school. This bottom group may need intensive help from a social worker or community organization trained to work with students and their families on poverty-related challenges, she says. "These students do not have the same issues," Chang says. "If you want to move the needle, you need to know about all three sets of kids."

Principals in high-poverty schools need a framework to develop the correct response to the challenges their students have. "It can't be a free-for-all," says one expert.

In New York City, principals in high-poverty schools could use some kind of tiered framework to develop the correct response to the various challenges their students have. "It can't be a free-for-all," says Nicole Gallant, a senior vice president at the United Way of New York City, which has years of experience administering the city's nonprofit attendance intervention programs. "School and community partners need to design strategic interventions for the highest needs kids and their families. It needs to be a whole-school, whole family approach."

Most educators we spoke with agree that building strong student relationships is a crucial part of the job. In the 13 high-poverty schools in the Center's study, staff thought they were doing this—yet many still struggled with very high rates of absenteeism and disheartening test scores. School leaders with persistently high levels of chronic absenteeism could cite general reasons for the problems, but few had taken the time (or had the staff time) to try to figure out what exactly was going on with each student.

And new academic demands associated with New York State's Common Core learning standards are challenging nearly all the principals in our case study group—even those enjoying an upswing, like PS 48. Only 14 percent of Principal Patricia Mitchell's students passed the ELA tests in 2013, and 11 percent passed math. She says she knows these results were similar to those seen in other high-poverty schools, but they were frustrating nonetheless, given the work she had been doing on teaching, attendance and other school improvements. "Our kids bombed the state exams," she said with exasperation.

As Professor Balfanz noted, attendance is just one of many things a principal needs to focus on to improve overall academic outcomes in a high-poverty school. More than half of the 13 principals in our case study group struggled to find long-term strategies that would bear fruit on the achievement tests.

Luis Torres, principal of PS 55 Benjamin Franklin, boasted one of the lowest chronic absenteeism rates in Morrisania when the Center published its first report on chronic absenteeism in 2008. When Torres shifted focus to do more to improve test scores in the following year, however, his chronic absenteeism rate immediately shot up to 35 percent. He then changed his school support network. He put up a white board in his office with the names and data of his most at-risk kids. He started holding his teachers more accountable for both academics and attendance. He nurtured various partnerships, including a health partnership with Montefiore Medical Center and a social work partnership with Graham Windham, all designed to provide more health, emotional and material supports for his students. But his school's test scores only bounced around, never showing sustained improvement.

In 2013, PS 55 posted a gut-wrenching 3 percent pass rate on the new Common Core–aligned ELA tests. On the Common Core math tests, only 9 percent of his students passed. "No matter what the data may say, we're working hard," Torres insists.

This past June, the United Way won a renewed $52 million contract to run the next round of New York State's attendance intervention programs using Mayor Bill de Blasio's favored community schools approach, which will layer in new health, job and social supports for families in some 45 schools that manage to win this aid. This announcement in June was the administration's first step toward a pledge to create 100 new community schools over the mayor's first term. To be eligible for the first wave of community schools aid, schools had to have higher than average levels of absenteeism and a goal of bringing down these numbers.

Gallant cautions, though, that the grant provides an average of $300,000 per school per year over four years. While this is significant, it will not necessarily buy the level of assistance the highest poverty schools need. Mentors can certainly be helpful, she says, but successful student support programs employ social workers as well. "You can't get good quality support for high need kids and families without adequately resourcing the work," she says. "The principals who are serious about reducing chronic absenteeism want to create personalized, wrap-around supports for their students—especially in the early years."

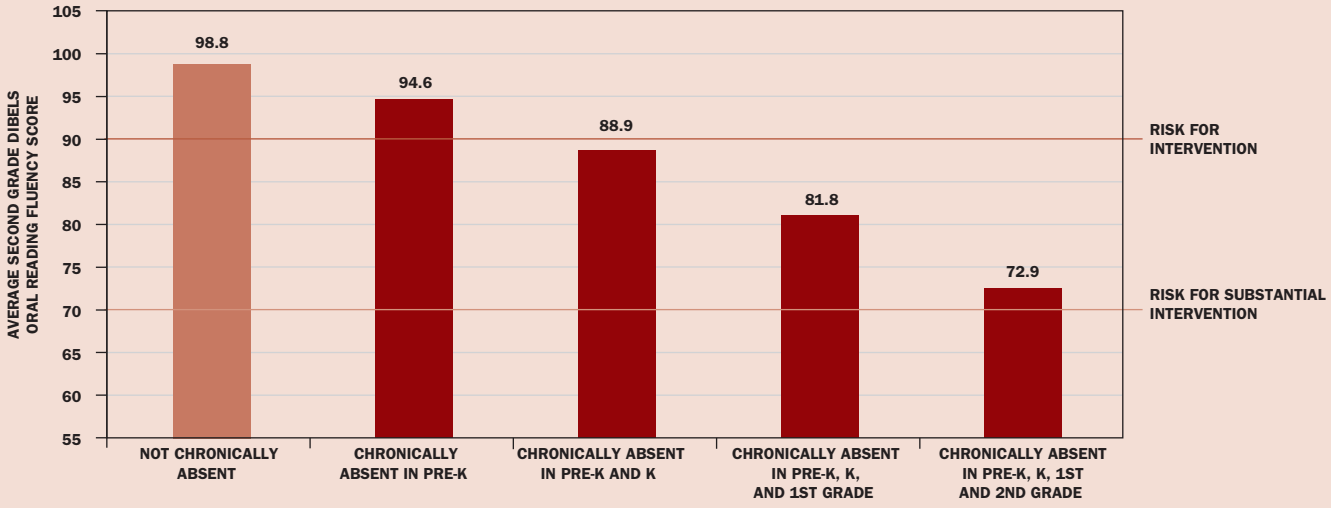
Clearly, improved attendance alone will not erase the challenges that high-poverty schools face academically. However, Mayor de Blasio and his deputies are banking on the belief that approaches like community schools, which are designed to improve attendance, health and parent engagement, will ultimately result in a better education for the city's low-income students.

"Test scores are one measure, but there are many other measures that give us a true sense of how a young person is doing," Mayor de Blasio told reporters in June as he announced millions of dollars in new money for community schools and after-school programs. "We have a huge, complex school system. We put a huge amount of money into it. But if kids don't actually walk through the door, this massive investment won't have the impact it should." ✶

FOR YOUNG STUDENTS, THE IMPACT OF MISSING SCHOOL ADDS UP

ABSENTEEISM AS EARLY AS PRE-K CAN LEAD TO LATER LEARNING PROBLEMS

The link between attendance and academics is forged early. This chart from a recent report by the Consortium on Chicago School Research compares reading fluency of 2nd-grade students based on the number of years they were chronically absent. Each year a child is chronically absent correlates with a lower average score on the DIBELS standardized reading fluency assessment. Even children who were only chronically absent in Pre-Kindergarten performed worse than their classmates who were never chronically absent. And students who were chronically absent four years in a row, starting in Pre-K, scored an average of 26 points lower on the DIBELS, placing them at risk in 3rd-grade reading. Other research by the Annie E. Casey Foundation has shown that children who do not read well by the end of 3rd grade can have academic and social-emotional issues that persist for the rest of their academic careers.



SOURCE: *Ehrlich et al.*, Preschool Attendance in Chicago Public Schools: Relationships with Learning Outcomes and Reasons for Absences, *The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2014, page 23.*

THE CITY'S DAY-TO-DAY ATTENDANCE JUMPS UP AND DOWN LIKE A HEARTBEAT

ALL SCHOOLS EXPERIENCE UPS AND DOWNS—BUT DIVES IN ATTENDANCE ARE MUCH DEEPER IN LOW-INCOME NEIGHBORHOODS

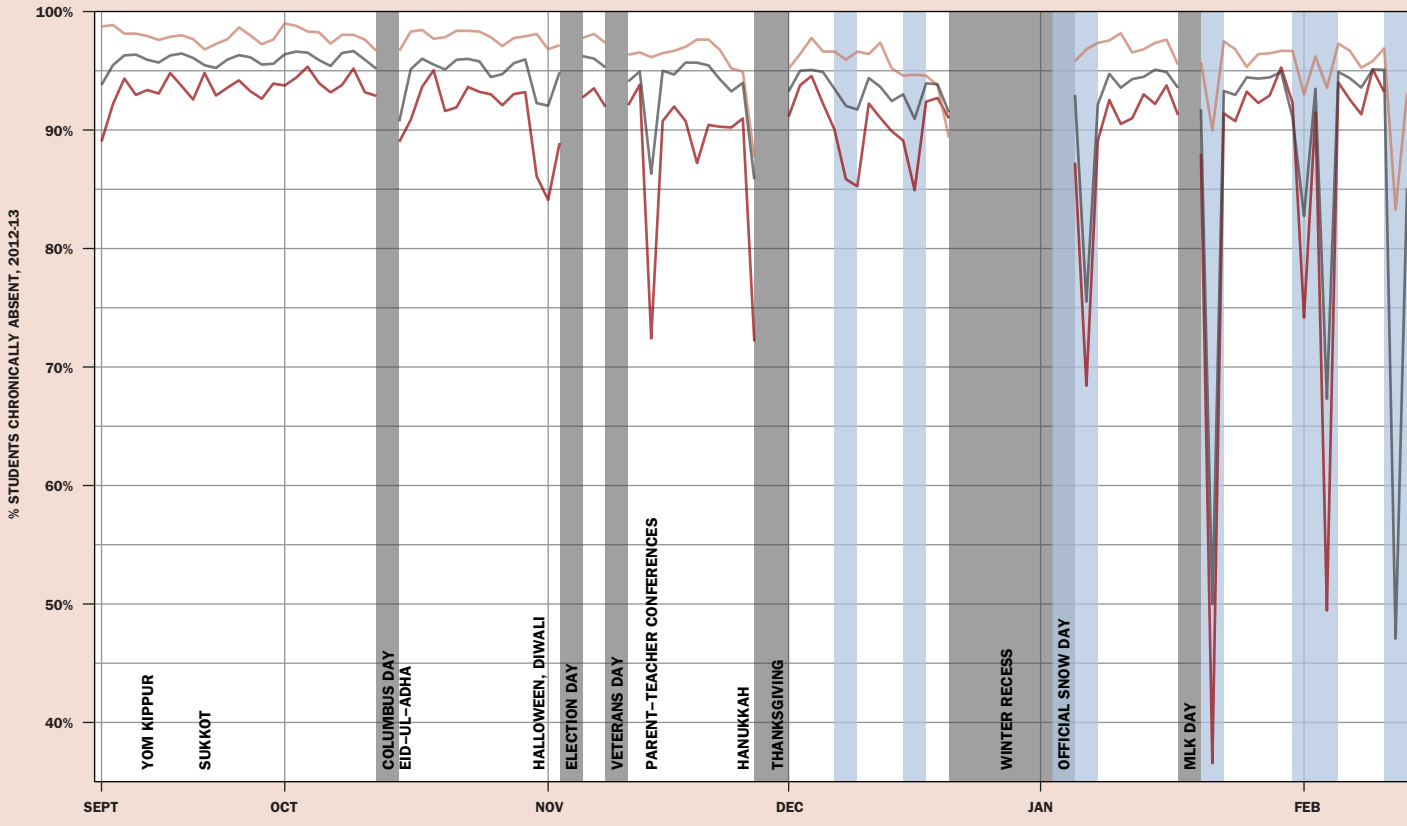
School principals have long argued that certain attendance factors are out of their control. The biggest of these is weather. Heavy snow, bitter cold or steady rain can send attendance diving throughout the city. But a lot of other factors affect attendance as well, and those "bad attendance days" tend to hit low-income communities harder than the city as a whole.

The daily attendance chart for the city's elementary schools bumps up and down like a heartbeat. The three lines show the percent of students who attended school, day by day, over the course of the 2013-14 school year. The black line in the chart below represents the citywide average for elementary schools. The pink line displays the heartbeat of PS 321, a well-known middle-class school in Park Slope, Brooklyn. The red line belongs to PS 140 Eagle, a very low-income school in the South Bronx.

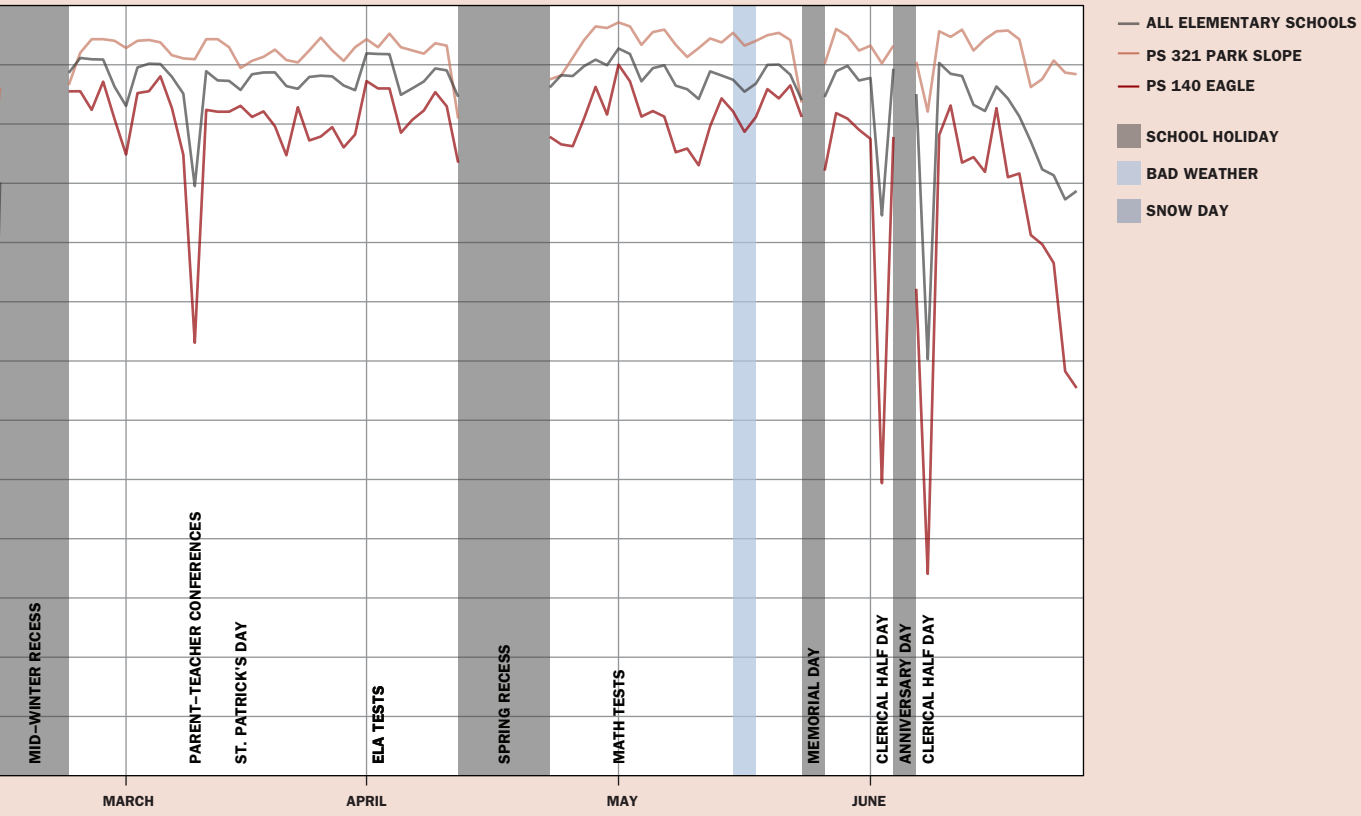
Attendance on Chancellor Carmen Fariña's famous snowy school days last winter looks like aortic failure on the chart. (Inclement weather is marked by a light blue band.) But there are deep dives for other things as well. Half days and days for parent-teacher conferences are ill attended. There are also dramatic dips before and after vacations and at the end of the school year. On the other hand, school attendance can also jump up as well, as we see on the state testing days in April and May.

The three lines tend to move in concert, but there are stark comparisons between schools. Like other schools in the Bronx, PS 140's attendance consistently travels well below the citywide average, sometimes plummeting when other schools simply dip. A snow storm or a holiday—like Halloween—that had a small but notable effect in Park Slope devastated attendance at PS 140 in Morrisania. Parent-teacher conference days and clerical half days are particularly tough on low-income schools. Educators can lose half of their students on those days.

PS 140's principal Paul Cannon has worked hard to build a friendly school that kids want to attend regularly, but he says he struggles with parent-driven issues like extended vacations and long weekends, which bedevil many of the principals we talked to in low-income communities. He adds that attendance can really take a hit in June—which features lots of field trips as well as a fifth-grade graduation and prom. While class may become decidedly more fun at the end of the year, all three lines show that parents see it as less necessary, meaning that many students lose out on a potentially meaningful last three weeks of school. Educators looking to make the most of limited time in the school year would benefit from looking at their own school's heartbeat to see which dips they may be able to prevent.



SOURCE: *New York City Department of Education: Daily attendance data, 2013-14. Center for New York City Affairs data visualization.*


MID-WINTER RECESS
PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES
ST. PATRICK'S DAY
ELA TESTS
SPRING RECESS
MATH TESTS
MEMORIAL DAY
CLERICAL HALF DAY
ANNIVERSARY DAY
CLERICAL HALF DAY
MARCH
APRIL
MAY
JUNE
ALL ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
PS 321 PARK SLOPE
PS 140 EAGLE
SCHOOL HOLIDAY
BAD WEATHER
SNOW DAY

Three Years, Many Lessons

Mayor Bloomberg's task force on chronic absenteeism learned a lot about what works to get kids to school regularly—and what is needed to dig deeper into the problem.

The attendance pilot was more successful at some schools than others. Among the 100 schools participating, 58 saw an overall reduction in chronic absenteeism.

In June 2010, City Hall mounted a full-fledged campaign to attack chronic absenteeism in New York City's public schools. Like Mayor Michael Bloomberg's high-profile anti-smoking drive and his attempt to ban "Big Gulps," the attendance initiative sought to change people's behavior. The Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism and School Engagement launched a three-year pilot program, dubbed "Every Student, Every Day," designed to find low-cost, high-impact ways to improve attendance in all grades using resources from more than a half-dozen city agencies.

The most visible aspect of the initiative was a major public awareness campaign, complete with eye-catching ads at bus stops and in subways. But the most effective aspect of the initiative grew from a simple idea: Educators need to notice when students are missing too much school, and they need to find ways to turn the situation around. This was accomplished with a large corps of new "Success Mentors" that began work in the fall of 2010 and would eventually be assigned to 100 schools citywide. The work of former mayor Bloomberg's task force formally concluded when he left office in 2013 (though the education department is continuing much of the work).

Bloomberg's task force reinforced ongoing work at the Department of Education, where officials were working citywide to get out the word on chronic absenteeism and providing assistance to the principals who wanted to deal with it. Both efforts have shown clear and positive results. Across all grades citywide, chronic absenteeism fell from 29 percent in 2009 to 24 percent in 2013. Among K to 5 students, the number dropped from 23 percent to 19 percent. (See "Chronic Absenteeism Has Gone Down Citywide," page 8.)

Perhaps predictably, the pilot was more successful at some schools than at others, according to numbers analyzed by the Center for New York City Affairs. Among the 100 schools, 58 saw their proportion of students who were chronically absent decrease from the year before they entered the pilot until the end of the 2012–13 year. A handful recorded very impressive drops. Dewitt Clinton High School and Bronx Collegiate Academy reduced their rate of chronic absenteeism by 12 and 16 percent, but starting from nearly 60 percent, they had much room for improvement. IS 68 Isaac Bildersee and PS 181 Brookfield saw more modest percentage point drops of 10 and 11 percent, but this meant they cut their chronically absent populations by over a third. In 39 schools, the rate of chronic absenteeism actually increased, but 26 of those schools were in the third year of the pilot, meaning they had less time for the interventions to take effect.

But the raw numbers do not reflect the different types of students, which is important in assessing any program's success. A separate analysis by Robert Balfanz and Vaughan Byrnes at Johns Hopkins University School of Education compared students in the pilot schools to those in similar schools that were not in the pilot. Balfanz and Byrnes concluded that minority students from very poor families who attended schools in the Bloomberg pilot program were 15 percent less likely to be chronically absent than students in similar schools not in the pilot.

In their report, *Meeting the Challenge of Combating Chronic Absenteeism*, Balfanz and Vaughan found that chronically absent students who had received mentors increased their school attendance by almost two full weeks a year. Narrowing the focus even further, the report stated, "In the 25 percent of schools with the greatest impacts, chronically absent students supported by Success Mentors gained,

on average, more than a month of school." Chronically absent high school students with mentors were 52 percent more likely to still be in school the following year than similar students in a comparison group who did not have mentors—a huge difference among teens at high risk of dropping out, according to the report.

Importantly, Balfanz and Vaughan also looked at the performance in school of the students who had been chronically absent but improved their attendance. Students who "exit" chronic absenteeism do much better academically, the authors noted, showing that is possible to "recover" from chronic absenteeism and do well in school. Among high school students, 80 percent who stopped being chronically absent in the 2009–10 school year were still in school three years later, compared to just 60 percent of students who became chronically absent that year and remained so. Academic performance improved as well: high school students who stopped being chronically absent improved their high school grade point average, according to the report. Elementary and middle school students who stopped being chronically absent were more likely to pass standardized tests than those who remained chronically absent. The authors found the strongest impacts were among elementary and middle schools students, especially among struggling students. (See "Students Who Recover from Chronic Absenteeism Do Better Academically," page 39.)

The Department of Education played a leading role in Bloomberg's pilot with the goal of learning from the work and implementing the most effective ideas citywide. Today, many of the most important features of the pilot remain in place in the pilot schools and in other schools interested in reducing their absenteeism levels. The challenge for Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration is to build on the initiative's successes, learn from its shortcomings and put the lessons to work across the school system.

HOW THE TASK FORCE WORKED

Mayor Bloomberg's approach to absenteeism adapted a template that marked many of his administration's other campaigns. The task force developed tools for monitoring data and methods for coordinating services and planning across many city agencies, while also relying on corporate contributions and a dollop of celebrity glitz.

Bloomberg's chief policy adviser, John Feinblatt, oversaw the effort, and Leslie Cornfeld, a former federal prosecutor, chaired the task force, which included heads of key agencies such as the Department of Education, the Police Department, the Administration for Children's Services and the Department of Homeless Services. The task force organized a public awareness campaign and got corporations to provide students and parents with incentives—such as pizza parties or trips to Yankee Stadium for the children and Macy's or Starbucks gift cards for the parents—for improving school attendance. Above all, the campaign sought to accomplish its ambitious goals without adding new expenses to the city budget.

The task force started the pilot program in the 2010–11 school year with 25 elementary, middle and high schools with above-average rates of chronic absenteeism, high poverty rates and principals who said they were interested in confronting the problem. The initiative expanded to 50 schools in 2011–12 and 100 in 2012–13.

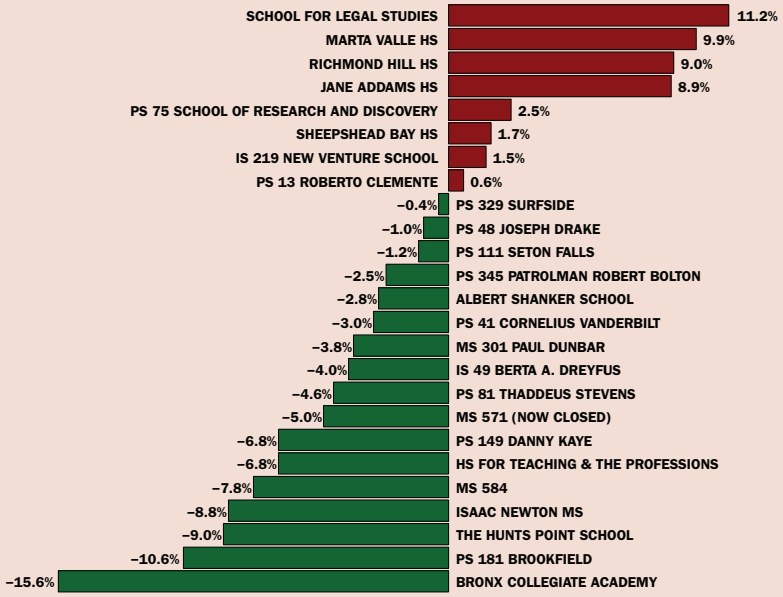
A big innovation was focused on tracking—and sharing—information about students in the pilot. The Department of Education agreed to share information with in-school mentors and community-based organizations through a new "data dashboard" displaying student attendance, behavior and coursework. The education department and the Department of Homeless Services also agreed to exchange data about students in the city shelter system. Most importantly, schools began tracking students who had been chronically absent in the past so they could focus on them the following year. "In this way, you can start identifying interventions and support for those students. Midyear

RESULTS WERE MIXED FOR MAYOR BLOOMBERG'S ATTENDANCE INITIATIVE

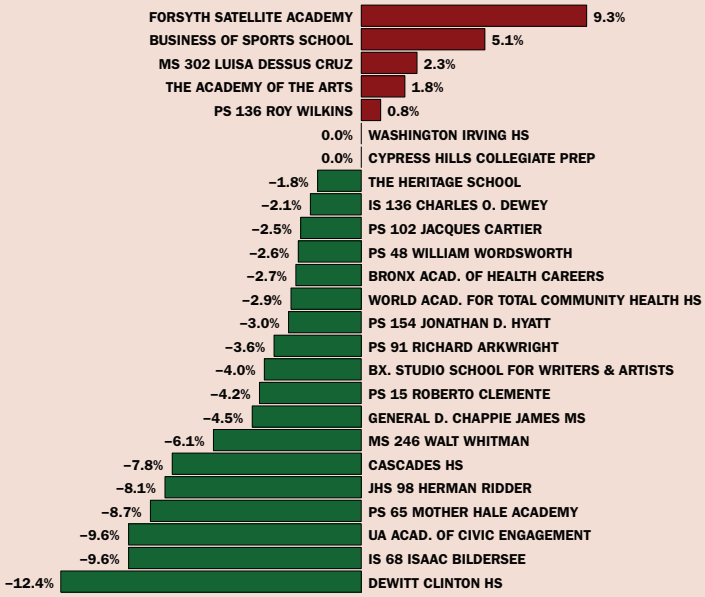
ABSENTEEISM WENT DOWN FOR MANY SCHOOLS IN THE 3-YEAR PILOT, BUT RESULTS WERE LACKLUSTER FOR SCHOOLS JOINING IN THE FINAL YEAR

In June 2010, Mayor Michael Bloomberg launched a citywide initiative focused on reducing chronic absenteeism, which recruited three cohorts of schools: 25 launched the project in fall 2010, another 25 schools joined in fall 2011 and a final, larger group of 50 joined in fall 2012. The first two cohorts were the most successful, with a total of 35 of 50 schools showing improvement. Fewer schools recruited in the final year were able to drive down absenteeism, though. These schools had only one year in the pilot, so time was short. The initiative had also grown substantially, making it tougher to manage from above.

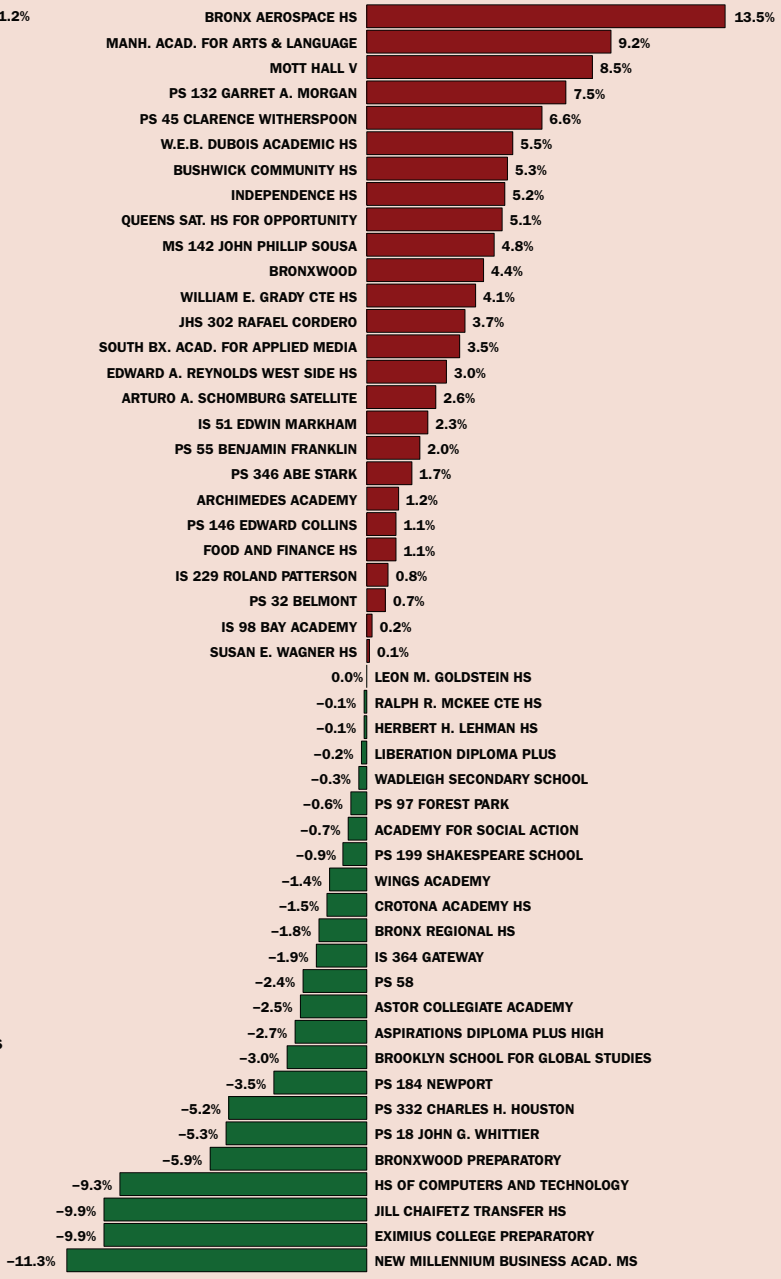
FIRST COHORT: PERCENTAGE POINT CHANGE IN CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM (OVER 3 YEARS)



SECOND COHORT: PERCENTAGE POINT CHANGE IN CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM (OVER 2 YEARS)



THIRD COHORT: PERCENTAGE POINT CHANGE IN CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM (OVER 1 YEAR)



you can't intervene until it's too late, but using last year's attendance records you can preempt," says Elayna Konstan, chief executive officer of the Department of Education's Office of Safety and Youth Development.

Once the work started in the pilot schools, participants discovered that many parents did not know how many days of school their children had missed, nor did they appreciate the effect that poor attendance could have on their children's education. This lack of wider understanding spurred the administration to step up its public awareness drive, producing an eye-catching public service advertising campaign with the help of the Ad Council. The first, created with AT&T, appeared on bus stop posters and on MetroCards, asking, "It's 9 a.m. Do you know where your kids are?" Celebrities were also enlisted for the effort, lending their recorded voices to wake-up calls targeting students who needed a push to get to school.

But the linchpin of Bloomberg's pilot was the arrival of the new Success Mentors, an array of volunteers and low-cost workers ranging from youthful recruits organized by City Year, a national AmeriCorps program that signs up young people for a year of service, to ReServe, an organization that places people ages 55 and older in public service positions. Others came from city programs run by the city's Department for the Aging and various outside organizations, as well as from inside the schools themselves.

The Bloomberg pilot sought to avoid the typical "feel-good" mentoring often found in less-focused programs. "We looked at failed models in other places and found a soft fuzziness around mentoring," Cornfeld explained in 2012. (She and others running the pilot left when Mayor de Blasio took office.) The task force developed a rigorous, day-to-day routine of mentoring by people who worked in established nonprofit programs or on school staff. "We're measuring them on how kids are doing, and the mentors appreciate and like that," Cornfeld said.

Each mentor was assigned two to 20 students. They usually began their days greeting students at the schoolhouse door. Many would then get on the phone, calling the homes of children who hadn't shown up for school. The mentors met one-on-one and in groups with students, often seeking to gently unearth the reasons for absenteeism. The key, says ReServe mentor Arnold Gordon, one of a team that worked at MS 246 in Flatbush, Brooklyn, was "non-judgmental, non-critical openness, no matter what the child is telling you, no matter how much it might collide with your sense of right and wrong."

The mentors quickly learned that some students weren't coming to school because they were already lagging behind on their academic work—yet they were falling further back with every day they missed. Mentors met with classroom teachers to find ways to help the students or provided academic help themselves. Other children missed school because they had to care for a younger brother or sister. Or they simply weren't getting out of bed in time. Or they had no reliable way to get to school in the morning.

Mentors arranged transportation and called upon colleagues—school counselors, social workers and after-school program staff—to help solve problems. "These kids just really want someone to hear them," says Jennifer Palacio, another ReServe mentor at MS 246. "They feel like they are invisible; they are unheard. Everyone is telling them what they should do, what they should say."

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PARENTS

Most schools in the pilot program tried to get everyone who was working on attendance—the principal, mentors, guidance staff, social workers and others—in the same room on a regular basis to review progress and assess problems. "The key infrastructure item, and this really goes hand-in-hand

The linchpin of Bloomberg's pilot were new Success Mentors, an array of volunteers and low-cost workers ranging from youthful recruits to experienced retirees.

with Success Mentors, was a weekly principal-led meeting," Cornfeld says. All principals were urged to have these meetings, with mixed results. Those who did schedule principal-led meetings were able to lead the effort in a "much more methodical, higher impact way," she says. These meetings also allowed staff to work with community groups and others who could help in schoolwide efforts to bring down absenteeism.

The teams came up with lots of useful ideas. To stave off end-of-the-year spikes of absenteeism, for example, PS 329 in Coney Island set up June excursions for students who had perfect attendance and scheduled graduation ceremonies for the youngest children during the final days of school. Even before it became a task force school, JHS 302 in Cypress Hills opened its gym and library at 7:30 a.m. to attract students who otherwise might get to school late or not at all. When she was principal at PS 102 in East Harlem, Sandra Gittens organized activities such as cooking, painting and chess. "These are the things that motivate children to come to school," she says.

Parents sometimes feel intimidated or become angry when they are approached about their child's poor attendance. Mentors had to be careful about the tone of these conversations.

At the elementary level, the Bloomberg pilot teams needed to figure out better ways to motivate parents to get their kids to school regularly, since parents are a big part of why younger students are or aren't absent. Parents give a litany of reasons for why their children are not in school. One parent coordinator at a Brooklyn elementary school says parents told her simply: "I couldn't get them up." She bought alarm clocks for the families. Other parents said they had an appointment that would have kept them from picking up their child at the end of the school day—so they decided to take the child with them instead of sending her or him to school at all that day. Salema Marbury, the principal at PS 329, says some adults allow children to stay home just because they can: Most of her chronically absent students, she says, have a parent who does not work or a grandmother at home who believes it's okay for the children not to go to school.

Parents sometimes feel intimidated or become angry when they are approached about their child's poor attendance, so mentors found that they had to be careful about the tone of these conversations. Ashley Prather of ReServe says her organization's mentors try to convey concern and empathy. They also call parents when they have good news to report, including improved attendance or academic performance. Overall, the mentors sought to present themselves as sympathetic adults, working with parents for the good of the children and their families. "When you mentor students, parents feel like they have a relationship with the school," says Gina Beldo, the attendance teacher at PS 81. "They feel they've developed an ally."

Asthma is also a major factor in many elementary school absences, so schools have encouraged parents to grant permission for school staff to administer the inhaled medication that can arrest an asthma attack or reduce its severity. Results have been positive. "We are trying to send the message that school is probably the safest place for your child in the event of an asthma attack," says Lindsay Branson, a former member of the mayor's task force, interviewed in 2012.

The situation is different in middle and high school. Older children generally make their own decisions about going to class. This was an ongoing challenge for the middle and high schools in the Bloomberg pilot. To reach more middle and high school students, Bloomberg's task force opened a new "engagement center" in Harlem in the fall of 2013. It is run by the Manhattan district attorney's office, along with the education department, the Police Department and the Police Athletic League. Using sports to attract students, the center offered counseling and tutoring. While some teens come in voluntarily, those with probation violations or caught up in truancy sweeps are also given the chance to go to the center.

TROUBLES AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Whatever the successes of Bloomberg's pilot, principals told Center researchers that significant numbers of parents—as many as one-third—do not respond to outreach. The Department of Education argued that this is not a reason to give up on their children. The DOE's Konstan says schools must persist. "You have to re-engage, re-engage, do it again, but do it differently," she says.

Yet with certain families, nothing seems to work, educators said. "Some parents don't get that it's their responsibility to push [the child] out the door and get them here," says Becky Murphy, a special education teacher and mentor at PS 91. The mentors at the school believed that one boy was frequently absent because his parents had him go out panhandling. And at times over the course of the initiative, Bloomberg expressed irritation with unresponsive parents. "In the end, the parents' job is to raise the child," he said at a press conference in May 2012. "We want to make sure the school system is doing as much as they can," he continued, but he added, "You have a child. You have a responsibility."

Technically, when a child is chronically absent schools can file a report with New York State's child abuse and neglect hotline, reporting a parent for "educational neglect." But this is a blunt instrument that rarely leads to much success. Some school officials express frustration that there are few consequences for parents when a child is missing school. "There are no repercussions," says PS 329 principal Marbury, complaining of parents who "say, 'I will, I will, I will' and then they don't, they don't, they don't." One social worker says he sometimes tells parents that child welfare workers might take action if they don't work to improve their child's attendance. He knows that's a remote possibility but adds, "The parents don't know that."

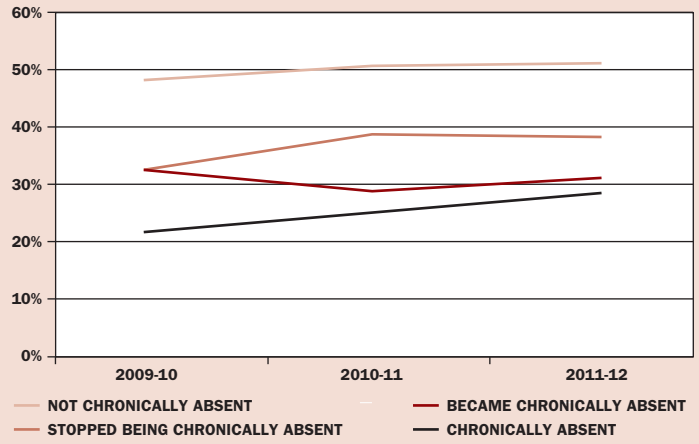
It is the job of the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to follow up on cases of educational neglect. And indeed, the agency was on Bloomberg's task force, but its overstretched workers were not especially active. This may have been a lost opportunity. Other cities have been able to employ their child welfare workers productively in efforts to deal with truancy. Baltimore gives child welfare workers a larger role in attendance. According to Attendance Works, a national group, Baltimore schools share data with the city social services department, and child welfare workers attend regular attendance meetings. Each summer, social workers visit elementary school students who missed 20 percent or more of school days that year to try to get to the root of the problem. In New York, ACS could have pulled off a similar effort by contracting with its nonprofit community-based preventive agencies to do the outreach work.

The gap between educators and ACS points to a shortcoming of Bloomberg's task force. While the effort enlisted help from many agencies, the Department of Education had the most at stake. Other agencies had other priorities, such as child safety, finding shelter and housing for families, or addressing health care issues. Observers say it was often hard to find common ground among each agency's competing agendas.

STUDENTS WHO RECOVER FROM CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM DO BETTER ACADEMICALLY

Researchers evaluating the work of Mayor Michael Bloomberg's task force on attendance found that improved attendance had a marked effect on students of all ages—and that it is possible to recover academically from bouts of chronic absenteeism. Elementary and middle school students who "exited chronic absenteeism" in 2010-11 and stayed the course in 2011-12 were more likely to score proficient on the state standardized tests. The number of students exiting chronic absenteeism and scoring proficient on the math test in 2011-12 was 9 percentage points higher than for students entering chronic absenteeism. On the English test, the difference was 5 percentage points. On both sets of tests, students who were never chronically absent performed best and those chronically absent for the entire period did the worst. The chart below shows the trends for math between 2009 and 2011.

PERCENT OF STUDENTS PASSING NEW YORK'S MATH TESTS BY CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM STATUS: 2009-10 TO 2010-11



SOURCE: *Balfanz and Byrnes,* Meeting the Challenges of Combating Chronic Absenteeism, *2013, pages 25-30.*

Going forward, it will be important to strengthen the ties between these agencies that serve children and families. Although the Success Mentors were helpful, says Jeanne Glassman Clair, executive program director of Counseling in Schools, some students need more than the "light-touch mentoring" they received through the task force. "There are kids that start to reveal much deeper trauma," Glassman Clair says. Early in the pilot initiative, Counseling in Schools worked with children facing especially tough challenges, including those in foster care, in temporary housing or returning to school from a juvenile facility. However, this part of the program was dropped, apparently because it did not produce the desired results.

LESSONS FOR THE NEXT STAGE

Principals who have not embraced efforts to improve attendance may be reluctant to put additional demands on their staff. There is also the issue of money.

Educators involved in Bloomberg's pilot largely agree that it laid a foundation for more work in the future—and a lot was learned over the three years. If the initiative is to have lasting effects, Mayor de Blasio's administration will need to make sure it becomes part of the DNA of New York City schools.

"I think we've begun to and will continue to raise the awareness of the issue," says Peter Goldwasser, who helped lead the pilot as a chief program officer in the mayor's office of policy and strategic planning under Bloomberg. He cites a number of important advances, including building a new infrastructure for sharing attendance data and other information about absentee students. "We've been working very hard to set that up so it's as easy as possible for schools, community-based organizations and mentors to share the information." (See "Do I Know You?" page 49 for more on the ongoing challenges around data-sharing.)

Goldwasser adds that the Success Mentors were a critical part of the program, but going forward the school system should try to develop mentors from staff inside the school rather than relying on outside groups to provide people. "We want to continue to support—as does the DOE—external mentors and peer-to-peer mentors, but we definitely realize that the internal Success Mentor program is a key component if this is going to continue to expand."

PS 91 principal Victoria Catalano sees other advantages in using school staff as mentors. "They really know the children in the school very well," she says. "If you're bringing in people from outside, they don't know the child, they don't really know the community." The researchers at Johns Hopkins concluded that both in-school mentors and those from outside organizations had a positive effect on attendance. "Either model can be used without lessening the effect," they wrote.

If Bloomberg's initiative expands, there's also the challenge of devoting more school staff time to this work. Principals who have not embraced efforts to improve attendance may be reluctant to put additional demands on their staff or divert them from other responsibilities. There is also the issue of money. The task force described the program as almost cost free, but each school received a few thousand dollars to defray the cost of parent summits, buy food for gatherings and supply gift cards and other incentives. And there were costs associated with the mentors' time and participation.

Indeed, Balfanz and Vaughan, while overwhelmingly positive, noted the pilot program had the smallest impact in its third and largest year. While that might stem from the havoc created by Superstorm Sandy and a long school bus strike, it also might be linked to the expansion. "Some schools brought on in the third year did not have the same level of need in terms of chronic absenteeism as schools in the first two cohorts, nor did some have the same level of school-building buy-in," the authors wrote.

The authors' conclusion: "The best strategy to increase attendance is to improve school quality and enhance direct student supports."✶

Without a Home

Educators and policymakers recognize that being homeless is a special hurdle between a student and getting to school regularly. New York City is still figuring out how to help.

On a typical night, more than 22,500 children are in New York City's homeless shelter system. Tens of thousands of others live doubled or tripled up in apartments with relatives and friends. More than 80,000 New York City school students were homeless at some point during the 2012–13 school year, according to the state education department.

Homelessness is a major concern when addressing chronic absenteeism because the barriers that homeless students face in getting to school each day are so great. The problem is particularly acute for certain schools in very low-income neighborhoods where more than 30 percent of students may be transient or homeless. (See "Schools Where More Than 30 Percent of Students Are Homeless," page 42.)

Homeless students miss school for many of the same reasons as their counterparts in more stable situations: illness, stress at home, academic woes, parents who don't wake them up. Such troubles, though, are magnified by the strain and inconsistencies of having no permanent place to live. Routines are hard to maintain when a family is staying in a new and potentially chaotic place and changing shelters or apartments from one week to the next.

The very process of getting into the city's shelter system creates obstacles. Families applying for shelter must have at least one meeting with homeless services workers where all family members—including school-age children—are present. These meetings are usually held during hours when children should be in school. And many families must apply more than once before they are accepted. In 2013, according to the Coalition for the Homeless, 46 percent of all families admitted to the shelter system had to apply at least two times and 22 percent applied three or more times. Most were rejected because intake workers determined the family had another place to live or because they did not have proper paperwork.

While they are waiting for a placement, families typically are housed in a temporary shelter for one night only. Advocates say these overnight stays are particularly brutal on children. Families are taken from the Prevention Assistance & Temporary Housing intake center, or PATH, to a shelter for the night, only to return to PATH early the next day. Children are often not in bed until after midnight, sometimes having had little to eat, and then roused early the next day to return to intake, all the while carrying their possessions in bags.

Getting a child to school under these circumstances is very difficult. In testimony to City Council in 2011, then-commissioner for Homeless Services Seth Diamond said that, while attendance for all homeless students was more than 80 percent in 2010, only 73 percent attended school in the early days of a family's stay in the shelter system.

Under the federal McKinney-Vento law, homeless students are entitled to remain in their school of origin—the school they attended before becoming homeless—until the end of the school year. New York allows homeless students, like other students who move within the city, to remain in a school until they graduate from that level.

But many children are placed in shelters far from their schools. In 2012–13, only 32 percent of students were assigned a shelter in their community school district. Another 38 percent were housed in their home borough but outside the community school district, according to the Department of Homeless Services.

Homelessness can be a particularly acute problem for certain schools where 30 percent or more of students are in shelters or transient.

SCHOOLS WHERE MORE THAN 30 PERCENT OF STUDENTS ARE HOMELESS

The New York City Department of Education tries to track how many children in a school are homeless, but that can be tough. Parents living with family and friends are often reluctant to report this to a principal, for instance, and few students want their peers and teachers to know they're homeless. The chart below lists elementary schools where 30 percent or more of children are known to be living in temporary housing. Most schools struggling with high homelessness numbers also struggle with other poverty-related risks, including chronic absenteeism.

DISTRICT	SCHOOL NAME	AVERAGE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM 2008-2013	STUDENTS IN TEMPORARY HOUSING 2012-13	STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR HRA BENEFITS 2012-13	PASSING COMMON CORE ELA EXAM 2012-13	PASSING COMMON CORE MATH EXAM 2012-13	TOTAL NUMBER OF RISKS
1	PS 188 THE ISLAND SCHOOL	39%	42%	78%	6%	10%	9
4	PS 72 THE LEXINGTON ACADEMY	25%	41%	70%	14%	22%	14
2	PS 2 MEYER LONDON	8%	40%	39%	35%	62%	11
1	PS 15 ROBERTO CLEMENTE	34%	40%	81%	4%	4%	8
8	PS 333 THE MUSEUM SCHOOL	37%	39%	78%	6%	5%	13
9	PS/MS 4 CROTONA PARK WEST	31%	38%	74%	15%	31%	16
27	PS/MS 114 BELLE HARBOR	13%	37%	10%	47%	48%	4
4	MOSAIC PREPARATORY ACADEMY	31%	35%	72%	7%	9%	13
5	PS 194 COUNTEE CULLEN	41%	34%	76%	1%	1%	18
16	PS 25 EUBIE BLAKE SCHOOL	41%	34%	78%	13%	12%	16
4	PS 38 ROBERTO CLEMENTE	37%	32%	71%	8%	6%	14
6	PS 28 WRIGHT BROTHERS	26%	32%	73%	17%	23%	10
8	PS 48 JOSEPH R. DRAKE	33%	31%	75%	10%	15%	15
9	PS 64 PURA BELPRE	28%	30%	82%	3%	5%	15
9	PS 53 BASHEER QUISIM	35%	30%	77%	24%	28%	13
10	PS 340	21%	30%	71%	14%	25%	12
3	PS 242 YOUNG DIPLOMATS MAGNET ACADEMY	33%	30%	68%	12%	9%	13

SOURCE: *New York City Department of Education, Progress Report Database, 2012-13. Some students were displaced in 2012-13 due to Hurricane Sandy. This chart may reflect some of those displacements as well as those due to poverty-related homelessness.*

Elementary school children are eligible for yellow bus service if they live a certain distance from school, but many homeless children do not receive it. In 2011, the Department of Education told WNYC that 1,908 of the 3,856 elementary school students in temporary housing who applied for busing received it. The assistant director of New York State Technical and Education Assistance for Homeless Students said the number was much lower. He told the City Council only 700 homeless students received busing that year. When a yellow bus route cannot be found, an elementary school student and one parent each receive a MetroCard for free public transportation. Middle and high school students (though not their parents) also receive MetroCards.

Commutes by bus and subway, however, can be long. In 2011, City Councilwoman Annabel Palma told the council that 34 percent of school-aged children living at the Saratoga Family Inn shelter in Queens spent at least one hour commuting to school. For parents who have jobs and two or more children, such trips may simply be impossible.

"They live miles away from the school and have to take public transportation," says Jennifer Palacio, a mentor who works to reduce absenteeism at MS 246 in Flatbush. "That's a huge issue." Children have the option of transferring to a school closer to their temporary housing, but changing schools is another disruption. "Parents want the stability of the school even if they move to the Bronx," says Gina Beldo, the attendance teacher at PS 81 in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

McKinney-Vento uses a broader definition of homelessness than the Department of Homeless Services, including those who share housing because of "economic hardship," live in a hotel "due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations," live in various kinds of shelters, including domestic violence shelters, or are awaiting placement in foster care. By this measure, at least 80,574 New York City school students (including public district schools and charter schools) were homeless during the 2012–13 school year.

In 2012–13, 35 percent of city students classified as homeless were in the shelter system (including motels and hotels); 55 percent were classified as "doubled up"; and the remainder were "unsheltered" (including teenagers living in abandoned buildings or on the streets), according to the New York State Education Department.

DIFFERENT SHELTERS, DIFFERENT STORIES

The city has long recognized the problem of absenteeism among homeless children and has made various attempts to address it. Mayor Bloomberg's task force on absenteeism, launched in 2010, had a special focus on homeless children. As part of that effort, the Department of Homeless Services and the Department of Education began to share data to identify where to direct attention. Education workers in shelters knocked on doors in the morning to make sure parents and students were awake. Some shelters added homework rooms and after-school programs so children who shared a bedroom with their parents and siblings had a quiet place to study. Some shelters assigned mentors to children who were having trouble getting to school.

In some shelters, efforts such as these fit in well with how the facility is run. As the 2012 school year drew to a close, five children gathered around a table in a bright basement room at West Harlem's Abyssinian House, a 25-unit shelter operated by the nonprofit Abyssinian Development Corp. They played a word game and eagerly told a visitor about 700 heads of lettuce they had grown. In the evening, the after-school program turned to teens, offering workshops on bullying and providing opportunities for the teenagers to talk about their experiences.

In an effort to improve school attendance and academic performance among the homeless, Abyssinian and some other shelters offer day care for young children so older siblings don't have to miss school to take care of a toddler.

At the Bridge Family Residence, a shelter in Bedford-Stuyvesant operated by the nonprofit Housing Bridge, a staffer checks the residents' sign-out sheets every morning to make sure everyone has left for school, work or other appointments. "Our parents are very busy. They have so many things they need to go to on a daily basis," says program director Junie Clauthier. Children cannot stay in the shelter by themselves and so, Clauthier says, "We don't have too many kids who don't go to school."

When they do have one, the staff tries to figure out why. Clauthier and social service director Kervens Dorcely spoke of one girl who would not go to school because she was ridiculed for her unusual appearance. Shelter workers sought to arrange personal instruction for her. "We want to make sure she gets an education," Dorcely says. Perhaps not surprisingly, though, the quality of shelters varies. Some other shelters are not nearly as supportive as Abyssinian and Housing Bridge.

In the 2013 *New York Times* series "Invisible Child," Andrea Elliott described Brooklyn's Auburn shelter, then home to 280 children and "a place where mold creeps up walls and roaches swarm, where feces and vomit plug communal toilets, where sexual predators have roamed and small children stand guard for their single mothers outside filthy showers." Dasani, the focus of Elliott's story, shares a room with her parents and her seven siblings. "Homework is a challenge. The shelter's one recreation room can hardly accommodate Auburn's hundreds of children, leaving Dasani and her siblings to study, hunched over, on their mattresses," Elliott wrote. (Auburn no longer houses children.)

Homelessness rose sharply in 2011, after Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Andrew Cuomo ended a city- and state-funded rent subsidy program. As nonprofit family shelters filled, the city increasingly turned to buildings owned by for-profit businesses to provide housing for the homeless. In 2013, according to the Coalition for Homeless, 51 percent of homeless families lived in these facilities, with 29 percent—almost 60 percent of whom had children—in hotels and motels. Another 22 percent were in so-called cluster site shelters, usually apartment buildings.

Under federal law, homeless children are entitled to school services. But to get that help, students or their families have to admit they are homeless. Many won't.

Many of these facilities offer few, if any, services. When an attendance teacher at PS 140 in the Bronx went to one such shelter to check on why a child had been absent, the only staff in evidence was a guard who had no knowledge of the student. After repeated knocks, the teacher was admitted to an apartment where a resident directed him to a room where the child's mother lay in bed. The mother quickly denied her child had been absent. "The computer made a mistake," she said. No one at the so-called shelter could confirm or deny that.

Under McKinney-Vento, the tens of thousands of children who live doubled up with friends and relatives are also considered homeless and entitled to services to ensure they stay in school. In its efforts to have the homeless live with friends and relatives, rather than in a shelter, the Bloomberg administration did not consider whether the home where the family would stay was anywhere near their child's school.

These students do not receive services that children in better-run shelters do. They can, of course, seek assistance from personnel at their school, including school-based family assistants and social workers, but to get that help the students would have to identify themselves as homeless, and many won't. "Young people don't want to say they were in the shelters," says Nikita Price, who was in a shelter when his oldest daughter was in middle school and now works for an advocacy organization called Picture the Homeless. "A lot of children make up stories. Kids will find a way to protect themselves." The mentors at MS 246 said they have never had a child voluntarily disclose that he or she was homeless.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Even though it does not reach all—or even most—New York children in temporary housing, the cooperation between the Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) prompted by the mayor's task force on absenteeism is generally seen as having been beneficial. It has created what Susana Vilardell, the DOE's director of students in temporary housing, described in a 2012 interview as a "change in culture." For example, she says, shelter staff is more likely now to question a parent if they see a child in the shelter during school hours.

"The mission of DOE is to focus on education. The mission of DHS is to focus on housing. But now both agencies are speaking the same language and so working together. It's very powerful when the two agencies speak with a family," Lois Herrera, the DOE's deputy chief executive officer for youth development and support services, told us in the same interview.

The Department of Education's Students in Temporary Housing unit has the task of making sure students in temporary housing, whether or not they are in the shelter system, have the same access to an education that other children have. It oversees family assistants at shelters who provide support for families, including helping them get the transportation their child needs to get to school. While these programs existed before the mayor's task force, the improved cooperation between DHS and DOE along with the access to phones and computers at the shelters, were intended to increase their effectiveness.

Katherine Winter, deputy director of the Education Rights Project at the Partnership for the Homeless, says the education department has a good structure for homeless students and praised some of the staff. But, she says, some schools seem to have little awareness of their obligations under McKinney-Vento. She knows of one child who missed 10 days of kindergarten because her local school did not realize they had to take her. "People are really just trying to figure out how to get their child enrolled," Winter says.

During his tenure as commissioner of homeless services, Diamond was intent on improving education for children in the shelter system. The city held its first parent summit for shelter residents, expanded the number of homework rooms and persuaded corporations to donate school supplies. Shelter staff,

Diamond said, were encouraged "to recognize and support families and children that are doing well—to celebrate that." But after he left the department's education efforts seemed to wane. It did not, for example, repeat the parent summit.

Mayor Bloomberg's task force on truancy, which targeted 100 schools in an effort to reduce absenteeism, had a significant impact, according to researchers at Johns Hopkins School of Education. "Homeless students participating in these efforts by attending task force schools were 31 percent less likely to be chronically absent," Robert Balfanz and Vaughan Byrnes wrote in their report, *Meeting the Challenge of Combating Chronic Absenteeism.*

However, the report did not provide any findings about homeless children at the 1,600 schools that were not in the initiative. An analysis by the Center of New York City Affairs found that four of the 25 middle and elementary schools with the most students in temporary housing were in the mayor's initiative. (PS 48 Joseph Drake was one of the original 25 schools in the program. In 2011–12, PS 65 Mother Hale, PS 15 Robert Clemente and the Academy of the Arts were added.) Two of the schools saw significant declines in chronic absenteeism after entering the program, while one saw the rate of chronic absenteeism rise.

Now that a new mayor and a new homeless commissioner are in office, there is no shortage of recommendations about how they might help homeless students. Advocates for Children has urged that the city streamline its student transportation process and start matching students with buses as soon as they enter the system rather than waiting for a permanent placement. Gale Brewer, now Manhattan borough president, would like to see the education department waive its five-mile rule—a school bus can travel no more than five miles from its first stop to its destination school—for homeless students.

Some have urged the city to look toward using schools as community centers, offering medical care and social services, as is done in Cincinnati. John Khani of the Council of Supervisors told the City Council that the city should move interagency cooperation beyond sharing numbers to having counselors and case workers from various agencies meet with vulnerable students at individual schools with many students in temporary housing.

Almost everyone involved in the issue agrees that the best way to improve attendance among homeless students is to place them in permanent housing. During his campaign, Mayor Bill de Blasio offered a number of ideas for doing just that, including increasing the city's supply of affordable housing, providing housing vouchers to families and reversing the Bloomberg administration policy of denying people in shelters access to housing vouchers or vacant New York City Housing Authority apartments.

So far, little has come to fruition. But in its first months in office, the de Blasio administration took some small steps. It announced that families with children would no longer be sent to two notorious shelters: Auburn—the setting for the *Times*' series about a homeless child—and Catherine Street. Families in the conditional shelters—those making the dreaded "overnights"—would now be able to remain until 9 a.m. In an apparent effort to reduce the number of repeat applications, the Department of Homeless Services will give families a form explaining why they have been rejected so they can try to address any problems before applying again.

In the spring, the administration said it would expand efforts to keep vulnerable people in their communities and out of the shelter system and ramp up efforts to help families find permanent housing. This will include providing rental assistance to 801 families a year and making some apartments in public housing available to families in the shelter system. The Department of Homeless Services also will review health and safety conditions at all the cluster site shelters around the city.

Asked at an April press conference whether some of these efforts might reduce absenteeism among students in temporary housing, DHS commissioner Gilbert Taylor said he hoped the department could take steps to reduce absenteeism. "Educational stability," he said, "is a priority of this administration." ✶

With a new mayor in office, there is no shortage of recommendations about how the city might best help its homeless students.

School, Expanded

Community schools are coming to New York in a big way. How the city structures the program will make a big difference on how it will help the kids who need it the most.

Mayor Bill de Blasio has pledged to establish 100 new community schools and build a new system to support them.

School runs late at PS 1, the Bergen Elementary School in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Well past dinner hour, the classrooms are still open, providing space for nearly a dozen different after-school learning and arts activities. In the auditorium, one group practices dance and movement inspired by circus performers. In the gym, a group of girls are locked in an indoor soccer battle. Students practice reading with a literacy coach or work on projects with the artistic director in classrooms up and down the hallways. In small groups, children as young as five are learning what it means to be a caring person and to take responsibility for their own actions. Keeping it all moving is a group of young adults, most of whom are alumni of this program themselves. "They have a lot more to offer than just running activities," says Helene Onserud, director of the Community School Project at PS 1. "They are trying to help their community move forward."

PS 1's after-school program is run by the Center for Family Life, which has been a popular fixture in Sunset Park since 1979. The goal of Onserud's program—like so many others in the growing national movement for "community schools" or "full-service schools"—is to provide a range of social and academic services to help students overcome poverty-related issues that might hold them back academically. The PS 1 program is rooted in the idea that children and teens need a safe space to help each other and build the community around them. Schools are also a natural gathering place for families, providing an ideal place for outside support, like counseling, employment assistance and foster care prevention. "We acknowledge that school is more complex than just classes," Onserud says. To students, she says, "There are things *we* need to work on to allow *you* to work on school."

The Center for Family Life is one of many community and social service organizations in New York City that have established formal partnerships with schools in the neighborhoods they serve. Organizations like the Children's Aid Society or Harlem Children's Zone are famous for their community and school partnerships, which seek to ameliorate poverty by wrapping a full array of social services around local schools, but there are dozens of varied examples citywide. Community-based organizations have been doing this work in New York City schools for decades, but the New York City school system has hesitated to fully embrace the strategy—until now. Mayor Bill de Blasio has pledged to elevate the status and support for these schools over his first term by establishing at least 100 new community schools and building a new system to support them.

Richard Buery, former president of the Children's Aid Society, has been appointed by Mayor de Blasio as deputy mayor in charge of strategic policy initiatives, tasked with delivering on de Blasio's community schools promise along with several other high-profile efforts, including establishing universal pre-kindergarten and expanding after-school programs in the middle schools. All three initiatives share the goal of using schools, community groups and other city agencies to improve the lot of low-income students in New York City. "We want to bring the resources, the partnerships and the bureaucracy together," he says.

Buery adds that the administration is committed to genuinely expanding the number of community schools in New York, not simply rebranding the work of schools that have long been doing the work. This process will begin this fall: Mayor de Blasio announced that New York City's share of state funds for attendance improvement and dropout prevention services will be explicitly used to help 45 schools

launch community schools models. “By the end of this mayoral term we will be able to say: ‘There are at least 100 schools doing this in this way that they weren’t doing it before,’” Buery says. But he adds that the bigger goal is to learn what is possible for low-income children in community schools—and figure out how the best elements of this work can be adopted by entire public school system. “I think every school in the system should be a community school,” he says.

EXISTING COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

New York City already has hundreds of school-community partnerships, thanks to the ambitions of prior administrations. In 1991, Mayor David Dinkins created the Beacon Schools program through the city’s Department of Youth and Community Development to forge very visible partnerships for children and community members in the city’s highest-crime neighborhoods. Today there are 80 Beacon Community Centers in New York City providing after-school enrichment, youth development and social services in school buildings until late into the evening and on weekends. But with funding at a lower level today than it was in 1991, many Beacon directors struggle to fully meet the needs of all the students and families they serve.

Mayor Bloomberg launched the Out-of-School Time initiative, also run by the Department of Youth and Community Development. It is the largest publicly funded after-school program in the nation, currently working with 157 nonprofits to run programs at more than 500 school sites. The program is expected to expand rapidly under de Blasio’s middle-school initiative, with a total of 271 nonprofits participating by this September. Multiple Pathways, a well-regarded “last chance” program for teenagers who had been unable to get the high school credits they need in the traditional system, was created by the Department of Education under Bloomberg as well. In this program, community groups and social services agencies work hand in hand with educators to design a variety of intensive support programs for participants to get them over the finish line and, ideally, into college.

New York City also boasts at least 129 school-based health centers serving some 300 schools, each backed by a hospital or clinic partner. And there are hundreds of examples of schools with other close relationships with outside organizations, ranging from charter schools to expeditionary schools to vocational and early college schools.

What is the difference between these examples of community groups working closely with local schools and the mayor’s new set of community schools? Right now, the specific guidelines are still being worked out. “We need to define in some meaningful way what we think a community school is in New York City,” Buery says. Officials from the mayor’s office and the Department of Education have been fanning out across the city, talking to school and nonprofit leaders about what a good community school looks like and what the city needs to do to build a much larger system.

Jane Quinn, director of the National Center for Community Schools, an organization founded by Children’s Aid, says there is a lot more to community schools than simply having social services located in the building. Many schools have outside partners, for example, but these partnerships go no further than agreement to share the space and students.

In a community school, the idea is to craft a set of programs and partnerships designed to meet the specific needs of the school’s students and their families. School leaders make this work a priority, Quinn says, working with nonprofit partners to design the programs, set benchmarks for success and make sure the children and families who need the services the most are receiving them. No two community schools are alike: some choose to focus on physical or mental health while others work toward better parent engagement, more stable housing for their families or career readiness for their graduates. Rather than providing “random acts of programming,” Quinn says interventions should be determined by parents, school leadership teams, and community partners based on the barriers to student success in each building.

Up to 95 percent of community school support can come from existing government funds, but raising the money comes at a cost.

Another typical requirement for a community school is a professional director (often called a resource coordinator or a community schools coordinator) who is able to cultivate partnerships, keep the school and community groups in line with the school's vision and match services to individual students' needs. Monique Flores, director of the Beacon and Out-of-School Time programs at University Settlement, is a typical example. Her organization, a large community group based on the Lower East Side, works with students at East Side Community School, freeing Principal Mark Federman to focus on academics.

At East Side Community School, which serves students in grades six through twelve, University Settlement and other partners such as the Public Service Corps and Borough of Manhattan Community College provide after-school and summer programs, crisis intervention for students with urgent needs and supportive services for teens. Flores uses data to evaluate the success of her programs, pulls funding from multiple public and private sources, and reaches out to other University Settlement programs like The Door for high-risk teens to meet the needs she can't address in-house. The work she and Principal Federman have done over the past 14 years lifted their school off the state's list of "Schools in Need of Improvement." To demonstrate the depth of their partnership, Flores points to her phone, noting that she and Federman exchange texts constantly. "This work requires constant communication throughout the day to get it right."

RULES FOR ROLLOUT

Building a network of community schools requires significant money and manpower. The Children's Aid Society spends between $1.2 and $2.7 million per year at each of its 16 schools in New York City. As much as 95 percent of these resources come from various pools of existing federal, state and local funds, but raising the money and administering the programs comes at a cost. Children's Aid employs more than a dozen people in its central office to do the grant writing, budgeting and contract management required to keep their community schools program afloat.

That kind of back office support is not possible for a neighborhood organization like the Community League of the Heights (CLOTH) in Washington Heights. In 2006, CLOTH was instrumental in founding the Community Health Academy of the Heights, a public school for grades six through twelve, around a community schools vision. Now CLOTH runs an after-school program there and at PS 4 Duke Ellington nearby, as well as youth leadership and adult exercise programs that run into the evenings. Myles Monaghan, CLOTH's sole program developer and grant writer, is strapped to manage the vouchers, audits, site visits and reports for the handful of small funds they do have. When two-thirds of the state funds they were receiving for after-school at PS 4 got cut in the middle of the school year, they had to cut their program accordingly. Monaghan says his difficulties are common for smaller community-based organizations: They understand the model and they understand their community's needs, but the "programs, unfortunately, have to respond to the money that is available."

CLOTH's history and connections in the community are important assets. Erin Verrier is a new resource coordinator hired by CLOTH to run the programs at Community Health Academy. She can count on the support of City Council members in Washington Heights and long-time partners like Columbia Presbyterian Hospital to create internships and outreach experiences for the school's students. "If I were just a resource coordinator going in blindly without a set of historic connections, I wouldn't have been able to do half of what I've accomplished this year," Verrier says. Her position was funded by the United Federation of Teachers' two-year-old Community Learning Center Initiative during the last school year, but her value has become so clear to Principal Mark House that he's funding her next year out of the school budget.

Do I Know You?

Timely and accurate data on students is crucial for school partners to target their programs and measure results. But sharing information isn't easy.

Mayor Bill de Blasio's team is planning to embed New York City's mammoth nonprofit sector in the schools, using the new community schools initiative and expanded after-school programs to link children to important services and education supports. But to be effective, these efforts face a huge challenge: how to share timely information on the kids.

Data-sharing has been a perennial challenge for the community groups and government agencies that have formal partnerships with schools to provide services, ranging from mental health counseling to after-school sports. The agreements to work in the schools do not guarantee that the outside partners will get the information they need to do a good job and monitor their impact on students. Nonprofit groups report that it is often hard, if not impossible, to get timely information on which students would benefit most from their programs and, once students are enrolled, on whether participants are attending school regularly or how they are doing in the classroom.

Jeff Edmondson is managing director of the Strive Network, which has been working to set up community and school collaborations nationally. Edmonson argues that data and other student information may be used to identify a school's problem, but it is rarely used with enough care and precision to actually solve the problem or improve academic outcomes. An after-school program, for example, may hope to help children who are falling behind but inadvertently recruit only the most active and engaged students. Or a program focused on reading may provide colorful books and kind mentors, but it lacks the ability to assess whether students' reading actually improved. "I call this 'spray and pray,'" he told a Bronx audience of educators and nonprofits. "We are going to spray resources all over the place—and pray it works."

HARD TO KNOW

Veterans in some of New York City's largest nonprofit agencies report that data-sharing has certainly been an issue around chronic absenteeism. Recent research shows that students who have attendance problems in September are likely to have problems throughout the year. But getting a list of students to target early in the school year is a challenge for many nonprofit partners, says Nicole Gallant, senior vice president at the United Way of New York City, which administers the city's nonprofit attendance intervention programs. Ongoing tracking can be even harder, she adds. Nonprofits in her program are tasked with improving their students' attendance, yet they aren't given access to students' daily attendance records to see who's making it to school. Workers often have to resort to watching the school doors to see if their students arrive or not, she says. "The community-based organizations have no data," she says. "We need a data-sharing agreement."

The problem vexes even major school partners. The Children's Aid Society is a leader in the community schools movement and has had long-standing relationships with 16 partner schools in New York City, leveraging millions of dollars in education and support services for students annually. The agency has considerable capacity to work with their school partners on supporting chronically absent students, but the lack of an established protocol for data-sharing makes it difficult to ensure everyone is focused on the right kids at the right time, says Abe Fernández, director of the organization's collective impact project.

"Knowing who missed a lot of days in previous years and which students are becoming chronically absent in real time—not long after the fact—would help us get those kids back on track," Fernández says. To realize the potential of community-school partnerships, the city needs a legal and technological infrastructure in place, he says. "Imagine if we could start the school year with a clear, shared understanding of which kids are most likely to be chronically absent. We could be acting on that information from day one."

HARD TO SHARE

There are two major issues that prevent school leaders from easily sharing information on their students. The first is that schools are governed by federal laws protecting the privacy of student information. The laws allow schools to share information with legitimate school partners, but the legal issues are complicated and intimidating. Second, educators tend to be leery about releasing any private information or data on their students out of respect for parents who could justifiably object to sharing sensitive information about their kids. While it is possible under federal law to set up legal agreements with school partners (or get parent permission to share data), this can be too time-intensive for a harried school administrator.

School administrators also typically have no easy way of pulling up, vetting and handing over targeted student lists and precise data runs. Many schools have useful internal systems, like DataCation, to manage day-to-day operations. But because these systems aren't designed to connect with outside vendors, school staffers still rely on pages of printouts from New York City's antiquated Automate the Schools (ATS) system when sharing information with outsiders.

Even with these issues, attendance data remains some of the easiest to gather and simplest to share, since the Department of Education has developed good systems for tracking attendance. But community groups and schools will likely need access to other kinds of information if they want to be as helpful as possible to high-poverty students whose attendance problems can stem from a wide variety of issues. School leaders, for example, say they could benefit from knowing whether a student is homeless, in foster care or on probation. Again, it is possible to get this information, but the process can be too time consuming for a school administrator.

All of this presents a major roadblock for Mayor de Blasio's goal of using the schools to help deal with poverty-related issues that tend to hold low-income students back. In his first six months in office, de Blasio announced four major initiatives that will require solid data-sharing among schools and outsiders to be effective: community schools, an after-school and arts expansion, and his mammoth Pre-K push.

For a long time, these kinds of partnerships in New York City schools have been in "spray and pray" mode, but de Blasio has promised to hold them more accountable for results in the future. "We will constantly go back to look to get the quality levels right, to make adjustments," Mayor de Blasio told reporters in June. "There will be ongoing quality control." Deputy Mayor Richard Buery, responsible for helping the Department of Education launch and manage these programs, acknowledges that data-sharing will be vital, particularly for the 100 new community schools.

Under Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the city developed an impressive data-sharing platform for the city's social service agencies called Worker Connect. The Web-based tool allows government workers to link to data about a family from human service agencies, including the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), the Department of Homeless Services and the Human Resources Administration as well as the New York City Housing Authority. Worker Connect is working well for the human services and other agencies that have already been connected, says Matthew Klein. As senior advisor for service innovation in the Mayor's Office of Operations and executive director of the Center for Economic Opportunity, he is responsible for building out this system.

Klein and his team have begun work on making human services data in Worker Connect available to Department of Education schools. This information could potentially allow a school administrator to see whether a student was in a shelter or had an open case with the Administration for Children's Services. Discussions are also underway to automate the exchange of school attendance data with ACS child protection and family permanency staff and ACS foster care providers under an existing memorandum of understanding to make it easier for ACS and the DOE to share information on students. Klein's team and DOE officials are working out the details to make sure this data-sharing meets student privacy requirements.

Importantly, the system is built to protect family privacy. Workers are only allowed access to the data if their agency can make a case that the information is critical to allow them to serve their client. (In addition, lawyers for both Worker Connect and the agency have to approve the release.) When agency staff are allowed access to Worker Connect, they can only see information that has been pre-approved for their group. A homeless services worker, for example, could not obtain child-care information on the families in a shelter at which he works unless the city lawyers agreed that this was important for his work and legally authorized.

Connecting staff from nonprofit social service agencies is an even larger legal and logistical challenge than the current system, which is only available to staff from various government departments, Klein says. However, the new community schools present an opportunity to allow nonprofits to access the city system since these schools would likely have a high-level staffer, known as a "resource coordinator" who could be trusted with sensitive student data.

Student information is legally sensitive. And while it is possible to set up legal agreements or get parent permission to share information, this can be too time-intensive for a harried school administrator.

One way or another, the city will need to develop some kind of data-sharing system for its nonprofit partners, Deputy Mayor Buery says. He acknowledges this is complicated technical work—and the information is sensitive, he says. "There are countless legal issues," he says. "And we understand this is not going to be fast, cheap or easy." But the city will need to get past these issues if the goal is to successfully help high-risk students. "We need to ask, which people in the school building need to be able to support the child—and do they have the information they need," he says. "Adults should have access to as much information as possible to be able to effectively serve that child." ✶

Joshua Laub, a former high school principal in the South Bronx, now a director of youth development at the Department of Education, believes groups with deep roots in a community are key. Unfortunately, such groups tend to have the least capacity to do this work. He believes that public and private funders looking for success that can be measured in numbers are "part of the problem." Larger, better funded organizations tend to work with students who are easier to serve rather than kids with deep problems, like those involved with the juvenile justice system or have parents with drug issues. "We need to ask ourselves, 'Where are the kids who live in the worst places going to get served—and by whom?'" Community schools will only work, he says, "if we can make it attractive for people to fight this battle" by providing more training, funding and back-office support to the small, very committed community partners and the principals who want to work with them.

Mayor de Blasio's team acknowledges that these are challenges for the roll out over time. As a first step, the administration announced seed funding for 45 community schools beginning this fall. Schools with the new funding will be given an average of $300,000 a year for the next four years to hire a resource coordinator, build partnerships with community-based organizations and provide direct services to children and their families. The Department of Education and the United Way of New York City, the nonprofit administering the program, used the schools' chronic absenteeism and attendence numbers to determine which schools were eligible to apply and then a blind judging process to decide which schools were likely to deliver the best results. The schools that won paired up with a community group from a list of established players chosen by the United Way.

Advocates of the community schools strategy are thrilled to see such a show of support from the largest school district in the nation, but many questions and challenges remain. Critics are quick to point out that Cincinnati—the first district in the nation to designate all of its schools "Community Learning Centers"—has only seen only marginal gains in learning. A 2013 *New York Times* article pointed out that only 48 percent of Cincinnati's low-income students were proficient on state tests compared to 68 percent of low-income students across the state of Ohio. Supporters counter that evaluating the strength of an entire system with only one metric is problematic because the students and the goals of individual community schools vary widely.

Experts in the field also say it can take years for schools to put the support systems in place needed to see significant academic gains. A small but growing number of academically rigorous evaluations of community schools that control for differences among schools have found significant levels of success raising math test scores (in Tulsa, Oklahoma, at the Harlem Children's Zone, and in the Communities in Schools network), improving attendance (in New York at the Children's Aid Society schools and in Boston), supporting English Language Learners (in Redwood City, California), and cultivating a better school climate (in Chicago).

Although Department of Education chancellor Carmen Fariña has expressed the desire to "look at something beyond test scores" as the city begins to build its own community schools initiative, articulating exactly what those standards are, building a system of support to help schools reach those standards and sustaining that system over the long term are complex tasks. This summer's infusion of funding for 40 schools will help establish the initiative, but it will not pay for some of the essential elements of a community schools system, like an integrated data system to track student needs and outcomes. It is also a fixed amount of funds from the state that is not expected to grow in the near future. If the city hopes to expand the initiative to at least 100 community schools, it will have to find new sources of funding. Katherine Eckstein, chief of staff at Children's Aid Society admits that "in many ways we are building the track as the train is coming."

The city needs to provide training, funding and back-office support to smaller community partners who are deeply committed to doing the work.

New York City would do well to look at the experiences of other districts with large community school programs. These districts provide valuable lessons for building a citywide support structure.

BEST IN CLASS: NATIONAL MODELS

Deputy Mayor Buery might do well to look to the experiences of other school districts with large community schools programs, like Chicago, Tulsa, Cincinnati and Multnomah County outside of Portland, Oregon. While these cities are smaller than New York City, they provide valuable lessons for how New York could build a citywide support structure for community schools.

Cincinnati's Community Learning Center initiative is probably the most well-known community schools program to New Yorkers, especially since the United Federation of Teachers flew all the Democratic mayoral candidates out to visit during last year's election season. A little more than a decade ago, Cincinnati became the first city in the country to keep all its schools open into the evening with the help of community partners. The district raises money from private grants, blends them with federal Title 1 funding for schools in low-income neighborhoods, and carefully divvies the money to hire as many community-savvy professionals as possible to serve as "resource coordinators" in the individual schools.

Cincinnati has also created a city data system, the Learning Partners Dashboard, which allows resource coordinators to see each student's involvement with other city agencies. It helps identify students who need services and determine what programs are available to help.

Chicago's Community Schools Initiative started in 2001 when the philanthropic community laid a direct challenge to Arne Duncan, then Chicago Public School's chief executive officer, to match their investments dollar for dollar to establish 100 new community schools in five years. Each side invested $50,000 per school annually for three years for programs and a site coordinator, with the district "making marriages" between investors and schools, according to Adeline Ray, senior manager of the initiative. When the philanthropic investments ended, Duncan added $18 million to expand. "We went pretty wide pretty fast," remembers Ray, ultimately expanding to more than 200 schools.

Duncan exited in 2009 to take the job of the nation's education secretary just as the city was plunged into a fiscal crisis in the wake of the Wall Street meltdown. The Chicago Public Schools have since weathered the rapid turnover of five CEOs over six years, threatening the sustainability of the entire community schools initiative. Ray says that thinner funds led them to reconsider what they really wanted to see. Now they are focused on quality rather than quantity, she says, reversing the past strategy, which was to "give each school one dollar and call it a community school."

The Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative (TACSI), has emphasized careful planning rather than rapid expansion. Beginning in 2005, TACSI executive director Jan Creveling spent 18 months researching the idea "to make sure the community could support the strategy." This crucial groundwork in the early years mirrors the work organizers expect from each new community school. Interested schools spend at least a year in the "inquiring" stage, learning from existing community schools before they can officially enter the "emerging" phase of building community partnerships. From there, the school and the community are expected to engage in "co-problem solving" throughout their neighborhood to establish trust and a shared vision around the community's needs. Only after this process, which Creveling says can take as long as three years, does the district fund a full-time coordinator in that school.

Much of Tulsa's community school funding comes from private foundations, but TACSI insisted all along that it would have to be backed by enough public dollars to ensure it would last.

Multnomah County, based in the Greater Portland, Oregon area, is an example of a community schools program that did not originate with the school district: The impetus for the Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) initiative came from the county chair and the city commissioner in 1998. Today, most of the core operating dollars (about $100,000 for a coordinator and some services at each

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Which Schools First?

Community schools are designed to help high-poverty schools. But schools with the toughest poverty problems may not have the capacity to manage these complicated programs. Is there another strategy for these schools?

When it comes to Mayor Bill de Blasio's plan to open 100 community schools in New York City, a big question is, simply, where to begin? Some 1,300 schools in New York City serve primarily low-income children. How does the city choose among them? Is there a way to ensure that schools that have the students with the highest-needs children get included in this initiative?

There is widespread consensus that the first new community schools need to have strong leaders and strong nonprofit partners. Both sets of players must be capable of handling the tough institution-building work associated with creating a community school. The first round of funding, announced in August, was competitive and given to 45 schools with solid plans for using the dollars wisely. Future rounds are also likely to require evidence that the leader and partners form a team that is capable of making the school a success.

"Community schools really start with a question about capacity," says Deputy Mayor Richard Buery, who is in charge of the initiative and has run both community schools and nonprofit programs in the past. "You have to have a strategy for making sure you have a strong principal. Part of being a strong principal is obtaining the resources to achieve your goals."

Unfortunately, many high-needs schools in New York City struggle to find the leadership and resources needed to compete for such funds. To identify the schools with the greatest "student risk load" in the city, the Center for New York City Affairs conducted an analysis of 748 elementary and K to 8 schools, measuring 18 data points. They included both community- or family-related issues like child maltreatment or homelessness, and school-based challenges, like poor school climate or problems with safety and suspensions. Center researchers found that schools with a high student risk load often struggled with teacher turnover—and many had a revolving door of principal leadership. (See "Chronic Absenteeism Reflects Community- and School-Level Risks" on page 20.)

More broadly, the Center's analysis shows that there are scores of elementary and K to 8 schools that need some sort of intervention or poverty-fighting strategy. Among the 748 schools in our sample, 373 were designated as schools with high risk loads, dealing with eight or more factors that could potentially put student academics at risk. More than 200 struggled with 12 or more risk factors. (The exact risk factors varied from school to school. See the Center's website at www.centernyc.org for details.)

The community schools model could be a valuable asset in dealing with poverty-related issues like asthma or homelessness in these schools. Schools struggling with deeper organizational issues might benefit from more intensive supports coming directly from the Department of Education. (One possibility is a program structure modelled after former Chancellor Rudy Crew's "Chancellor's District," which identified high-needs schools and provided intensive teaching supports along with extra dollars for student assistance.)

Eligibility for the city's first round of new community schools was largely determined by a school's attendance rate. (Funding for these community schools comes from a New York State program to improve attendance and dropout prevention.) To qualify for the competition, schools had to have absentee rates above the citywide average, according to education department officials.

But many schools are dealing with far more severe absenteeism problems. As this report went to press, city officials announced which schools had won the community schools competition. Eleven of the 45 schools that were named were elementary schools. In that group of 11, only four were on the Center's list of schools with the city's highest chronic absenteeism levels. (See "The Schools to Watch: Elementary Schools with the Highest Level of Chronic Absenteeism in NYC," page 60.)

Both the mayor's office and the Department of Education have signaled that New York City's struggling schools are a priority. Education department Chancellor Carmen Fariña promised action in the coming months in response to criticism from principals who said publicly that they need support. Deputy Mayor Buery also promised to consider the needs of these schools as the community schools initiative evolves. The 45 schools in the first round of the initiative will certainly be serving high-needs children, Buery says. But, he adds, there hasn't yet been an effort to identify schools with the very highest needs. "It's a bit early. We don't have a plan to identify the neighborhoods and priorities for that work yet," he said in July, adding that he hopes this day will come soon. "If we're serious about doing this, we will eventually have to have a plan for every school." ✶

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school) comes from a combination of city and county non-education dollars, supplemented by a local "Children's Levy." Diana Hall, program supervisor of the SUN system, says that housing the program outside the school district also has kept other players like Parks and Recreation and anti-poverty organizations in the game.

But working across so many different agencies requires coordination and compromise. Hall admits that they have ridden a lucky tide of political support. This year, for example, rather than compete with each other in the annual "budget dance," the county chair and the mayor agreed to share many of the core costs for the SUN system. This willingness to share responsibility for funding will allow SUN to expand next year from 70 school sites to 90, well over half of the county's 137 public schools.

What can New York City learn from other cities' experiences? The successful programs have these features in common:

First, a government department or nonprofit collaborative was named as an intermediary to help individual schools and community groups with professional development and technical aspects of this work.

Second, the cities invested public dollars, whether they were new funds through tax levies, reallocation of existing public dollars, or competitive funds like the federal 21st Century Community Learning Center grant. Private dollars are helpful to start the process, but public investment is crucial. "We can't 501(c)3 our way out of this," says Quinn at the National Center for Community Schools.

Finally, all of these cities established a broad vision for what they want their schools to accomplish. They expect principals to share leadership, space and other resources with community-based organizations but give them enough flexibility to meet their communities' needs in a variety of ways.

Of course, New York City will have its own goals and constraints that will ultimately determine how the community schools strategy is built out. Choosing the schools, community organizations and neighborhoods that are ready to take on this complex strategy will be a crucial part of the process. But to ensure their success, the city has to craft the right system-wide support structures to help them build capacity, access funding and truly integrate the services they provide to meet their students' needs. Seen in this light, the city has to accomplish for its community schools what the schools have been trying to do for their students for more than 30 years. "It's not easy, but at a point you reach a synergy where it just works, where there's a sense of mission that everyone has," says Helene Onserud at PS 1 in Sunset Park. "But it's hard to get if you don't take the time to build it." ✶

What Makes a Community School? Six Standards

As the city sets its sights on the goal of establishing 100 more community schools, officials will have to start educating principals, teachers, parents and the public about exactly what communities schools are.

This is easier said than done: there is no one "model" to define the perfect community school, nor are all community schools fully developed immediately out of the gate. Instead, it is helpful to view community schools as defined by a set of standards that they all work toward. This list of possible standards is adapted from a September 2014 report by the Center for New York City Affairs and the Children's Aid Society on how the city can scale up its community school initiative. A copy of this report, *Scaling the Community School Strategy in New York City,* is available on the Center's website at www.centernyc.org.

1. Community schools must have partnerships that support a holistic definition of student success. High expectations for all students and a strong, clear instructional vision are critical to ensure that schools are focused on academic success, socio-emotional development and physical health. Without community partners, however, many schools have a limited capacity to help students achieve that holistic vision of success. Some community schools may have one large nonprofit that can take the lead on coordination and provide multiple services, while others have one lead coordinating partner that brokers relationships with multiple other groups.

2. Schools and community partners must be fully integrated. Adopting a community school strategy is more than just adding another program within the school. Rather than "wrapping around" the core functions of the school, community schools should have a co-leadership model, where a team of school and community-based organization staff, parents, youth and other relevant community stakeholders engages in long-term planning. Day-to-day implementation should also integrate school and community-based organization staff into one team, which allows both sides to share their perspectives and stay abreast of the daily issues that students and their families face.

3. Community schools must have a dedicated person and support team responsible for coordination. At least one staff person at a community school should be dedicated to coordinating relationships between the school and its community partners. Trained, talented professionals need to integrate and target all the services in the building to meet the shared goals of the school and its partners. This person or team is dedicated to ensuring that school staff and community partners are communicating and tracking their progress toward shared goals.

4. Community schools must implement a comprehensive needs and assets assessment. To set long-term goals and benchmarks, a community school must know the needs of its community as well as the types and quality of supports that are available to address those needs (often referred to as asset mapping). This requires an inclusive representation of community stakeholders, such as parents, youth, teachers, school staff, clergy, elected officials and business leaders. A comprehensive needs and assets assessment is done at both the initial planning stages and on an ongoing basis to track improvement over time.

5. Community schools must collect, track and analyze data. The community school coordinator and partners need real-time, quantitative and qualitative data to ensure that interventions and supports are tailored to the actual needs of students, families and communities and are effective in achieving their objectives. Although community schools differ in terms of data collection procedures or types of data collected, all community schools must define indicators and measure that their programs are constantly improving.

6. Community schools must be located in safe and accessible buildings and be open during evenings and weekends. Community schools must be able to safely accommodate the various populations they engage, including children, teenagers and adults, or be near other schools or community centers that can. They must be able to stay open into the evening and through summer vacations and other school holidays—student, family and community needs do not pause when normal school schedules do. In cases of co-location, all principals in a building must adopt a "campus approach," where all schools work together for the support of all students.

If the city puts standards such as these at the forefront of its new community schools initiative, it will make it clear to schools interested in joining the initiative that they must do more than simply tack on outside partners, additional programs or a new staff member to be considered a community school. They will not all have the same approach or timeline for reaching these standards, but they all must be open to new ways of thinking about student success, and be willing to share resources, data, space and leadership to get there. ✶

ATTENDANCE CHALLENGES IN NEW YORK CITY'S LOW-INCOME DISTRICTS REQUIRE A GEOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM

While absenteeism can vary greatly among schools in the same neighborhood, there is no doubt that the lowest-income school districts face far greater challenges overall. The chart below highlights the districts and neighborhoods where chronic absenteeism is highest. Eight of the city's 32 school districts have average elementary chronic absenteeism rates above 30 percent and high school chronic absenteeism rates approaching or exceeding 50 percent. Other districts, like 27 and 32, have less of a problem with elementary and middle school absenteeism but worrying high school attendance rates. Efforts to improve absenteeism and poverty supports should be aimed at these highest needs districts.

CHRONIC AND SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM: NEW YORK CITY BY DISTRICT AND GRADE SCHOOL YEAR 2012-13

DISTRICT[1]	GRADE[2]	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS	TOTAL PERCENT OF STUDENTS WITH CHRONIC AND SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENCE[5]
DISTRICT 1: MANHATTAN	K to 5th	5,659	19.9
Lower East Side, Chinatown	6th to 8th	2,672	20.2
	9th to 12th	3,694	37.9
DISTRICT 2: MANHATTAN	K to 5th	17,554	9.6
Most of Manhattan below 57th Street,	6th to 8th	7,159	8.9
Upper East Side	9th to 12th	36,927	34.1
DISTRICT 3: MANHATTAN	K to 5th	9,033	16.8
Upper West Side,	6th to 8th	4,232	17.0
Morningside Heights, Manhattan Village	9th to 12th	9,213	32.2
DISTRICT 4: MANHATTAN	K to 5th	6,760	25.1
Upper East Side,	6th to 8th	3,292	21.3
East Harlem	9th to 12th	3,564	25.5
DISTRICT 5: MANHATTAN	K to 5th	5,469	34.1
Harlem, Morningside Heights	6th to 8th	2,940	29.1
	9th to 12th	4,181	41.0
DISTRICT 6: MANHATTAN	K to 5th	12,922	20.0
Washington Heights, Inwood,	6th to 8th	6,035	19.5
Hamilton Heights	9th to 12th	5,804	38.6
DISTRICT 7: THE BRONX	K to 5th	8,234	31.1
Mott Haven, Port Morris, Morrisania,	6th to 8th	4,183	33.6
The Hub	9th to 12th	6,930	52.3
DISTRICT 8: THE BRONX	K to 5th	13,890	29.6
Morrisania, Castle Hill, Soundview	6th to 8th	6,847	32.0
Eastchester Bay, Bronx River	9th to 12th	8,978	55.6
DISTRICT 9: THE BRONX	K to 5th	18,062	30.1
Highbridge, Concourse, Claremont,	6th to 8th	8,933	29.1
Morris Heights, Mount Hope, Crotona Park East	9th to 12th	8,378	44.0
DISTRICT 10: THE BRONX	K to 5th	26,149	25.6
Morris Heights, Kingsbridge, Belmont,	6th to 8th	11,838	24.6
Fordham, Bedford Park, Riverdale	9th to 12th	18,268	37.4
DISTRICT 11: THE BRONX	K to 5th	19,755	23.5
Wakefield, Parkchester, Baychester,	6th to 8th	9,469	22.8
Williamsbridge, Co-Op City, Woodlawn	9th to 12th	9,360	31.1
DISTRICT 12: THE BRONX	K to 5th	11,623	31.2
Soundview, West Farms, Morrisania,	6th to 8th	5,488	28.5
Tremont, East Tremont, Crotona Park East	9th to 12th	6,444	51.9
DISTRICT 13: BROOKLYN	K to 5th	6,993	26.7
Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Bedford-Stuyvesant	6th to 8th	3,062	29.4
Brooklyn Heights, Prospect Heights	9th to 12th	12,328	27.5
DISTRICT 14: BROOKLYN	K to 5th	8,071	19.2
Williamsburg, East Williamsburg,	6th to 8th	4,071	23.2
Greenpoint	9th to 12th	7,478	44.4
DISTRICT 15: BROOKLYN	K to 5th	17,515	11.2
Park Slope, Carroll Gardens, Boerum	6th to 8th	5,133	15.5
Hill, Sunset Park, Red Hook, Kensington	9th to 12th	5,456	40.1
DISTRICT 16: BROOKLYN	K to 5th	4,450	31.7
Weeksville, Bushwick, Oceanhill	6th to 8th	1,918	30.3
	9th to 12th	2,462	51.2

Students with 0 to 9 absences		Students with 10 to 17 absences		CHRONIC ABSENCE[3] Students with 18 to 35 absences		SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENCE[4] Students with 36 or more absences	
Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2,982	52.7	1,553	27.4	882	15.6	242	4.3
1,552	58.1	580	21.7	390	14.6	151	5.6
1.575	42.6	720	19.5	622	16.8	777	21.0
11,722	66.8	4,141	23.6	1,426	8.1	265	1.5
5,269	73.6	1,250	17.5	469	6.6	171	2.4
16,589	44.9	7,756	21.0	5,796	15.7	6,786	18.4
4,998	55.3	2,513	27.8	1,177	13.0	345	3.8
2,504	59.2	1,010	23.9	533	12.6	185	4.4
4,396	47.7	1,851	20.1	1,329	14.4	1,637	17.8
3,180	47.0	1,881	27.8	1,303	19.3	396	5.9
1,699	51.6	891	27.1	512	15.6	190	5.8
1,855	52.0	799	22.4	517	14.5	393	11.0
1,964	35.9	1,639	30.0	1,389	25.4	477	8.7
1,341	45.6	742	25.2	547	18.6	310	10.5
1,603	38.3	864	20.7	851	20.4	863	20.6
6,606	51.1	3,735	28.9	2,094	16.2	487	3.8
3,438	57.0	1,423	23.6	833	13.8	341	5.7
2,110	36.4	1,456	25.1	1,183	20.4	1,055	18.2
3,333	40.5	2,343	28.5	1,831	22.2	727	8.8
1,675	40.0	1,102	26.3	896	21.4	510	12.2
1,856	26.8	1,447	20.9	1,542	22.3	2,085	30.1
5,701	41.0	4,084	29.4	3,082	22.2	1,023	7.4
2,680	39.1	1,976	28.9	1,524	22.3	667	9.7
2,112	23.5	1,876	20.9	1,980	22.1	3,010	33.5
7,532	41.7	5,101	28.2	3,963	21.9	1,466	8.1
3,918	43.9	2,416	27.0	1,731	19.4	868	9.7
2,798	33.4	1,896	22.6	1,875	22.4	1,809	21.6
11,750	44.9	7,699	29.4	5,190	19.8	1,510	5.8
5,760	48.7	3,166	26.7	2,140	18.1	772	6.5
7,715	42.2	3,718	20.4	2,982	16.3	3,853	21.1
9,336	47.3	5,770	29.2	3,584	18.1	1,065	5.4
4,716	49.8	2,596	27.4	1,498	15.8	659	7.0
4,556	48.7	1,894	20.2	1,291	13.8	1,619	17.3
4,684	40.3	3,307	28.5	2,663	22.9	969	8.3
2,385	43.5	1,541	28.1	1,112	20.3	450	8.2
1,771	27.5	1,328	20.6	1,340	20.8	2,005	31.1
3,054	43.7	2,072	29.6	1,339	19.1	528	7.6
1,321	43.1	840	27.4	599	19.6	302	9.9
6,748	54.7	2,190	17.8	1,669	13.5	1,721	14.0
4,216	52.2	2,307	28.6	1,259	15.6	289	3.6
2,145	52.7	983	24.1	644	15.8	299	7.3
2,675	35.8	1,481	19.8	1,492	20.0	1,830	24.5
11,315	64.6	4,242	24.2	1,618	9.2	340	1.9
3,132	61.0	1,203	23.4	619	12.1	179	3.5
1,963	36.0	1,306	23.9	1,084	19.9	1,103	20.2
1,652	37.1	1,388	31.2	1,061	23.8	349	7.8
757	39.5	579	30.2	421	21.9	161	8.4
766	31.1	435	17.7	467	19.0	794	32.3

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CHRONIC AND SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM: NEW YORK CITY BY DISTRICT AND GRADE SCHOOL YEAR 2012-13 *(continued)*

DISTRICT[1]	GRADE[2]	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS	TOTAL PERCENT OF STUDENTS WITH CHRONIC AND SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENCE[5]
DISTRICT 17: BROOKLYN	K to 5th	10,638	24.5
Prospect Lefferts Gardens, Prospect Heights,	6th to 8th	6,180	21.9
Ditmas Park, Weeksville	9th to 12th	8,404	32.6
DISTRICT 18: BROOKLYN	K to 5th	8,807	20.2
Prospect Lefferts Gardens, Canarsie	6th to 8th	4,394	18.5
	9th to 12th	4,600	47.0
DISTRICT 19: BROOKLYN	K to 5th	12,321	29.5
Highland Park, East New York	6th to 8th	5,572	30.6
	9th to 12th	6,352	50.6
DISTRICT 20: BROOKLYN	K to 5th	23,216	9.3
Bay Ridge, Sunset Park, Borough Park,	6th to 8th	11,028	10.7
Dyker Heights, Bath Beach, Mapleton	9th to 12th	12,738	30.3
DISTRICT 21: BROOKLYN	K to 5th	12,644	20.1
Coney Island, Homecrest, Marine Park,	6th to 8th	8,242	17.5
Mapleton, Bath Beach	9th to 12th	12,169	31.3
DISTRICT 22: BROOKLYN	K to 5th	17,763	14.2
Flatbush, Flatlands, Sheepshead Bay,	6th to 8th	6,929	16.6
Prospect Lefferts Gardens, Marine Park	9th to 12th	10,254	21.0
DISTRICT 23: BROOKLYN	K to 5th	5,245	39.9
Ocean Hill, Brownsville	6th to 8th	3,485	29.7
	9th to 12th	1,961	58.6
DISTRICT 24: QUEENS	K to 5th	29,797	11.0
Corona, Elmhurst, Woodside, Glendale	6th to 8th	12,432	12.8
	9th to 12th	13,578	28.4
DISTRICT 25: QUEENS	K to 5th	16,771	9.5
Kew Gardens Hills, College Point, Flushing	6th to 8th	7,775	11.6
Whitestone, Hillcrest	9th to 12th	10,952	37.6
DISTRICT 26: QUEENS	K to 5th	10,683	5.7
Oakland Gardens, Douglaston, Bayside,	6th to 8th	5,809	5.4
Fresh Meadows, Bellrose, Holliswood	9th to 12th	14,764	24.2
DISTRICT 27: QUEENS	K to 5th	22,041	22.1
Howard Beach, Ozone Park, Kew Gardens,	6th to 8th	11,295	23.6
South Jamaica, Woodhaven, Far Rockaway	9th to 12th	11,261	48.9
DISTRICT 28: QUEENS	K to 5th	16,746	16.5
Jamaica, South Jamaica, Richmond Hill,	6th to 8th	7,253	17.3
Glendale, Rego Park	9th to 12th	14,261	26.7
DISTRICT 29: QUEENS	K to 5th	15,564	18.5
Saint Albans, Cambria Heights, Rosedale,	6th to 8th	7,439	17.3
Jamaica, South Jamaica, Holliswood	9th to 12th	3,880	35.1
DISTRICT 30: QUEENS	K to 5th	19,333	12.7
Woodside, Astoria, East Elmhurst, Sunnyside	6th to 8th	9,886	11.4
Ravenswood	9th to 12th	10,349	28.9
DISTRICT 31: STATEN ISLAND	K to 5th	28,341	18.3
Staten Island	6th to 8th	12,706	21.8
	9th to 12th	17,673	26.1
DISTRICT 32: BROOKLYN	K to 5th	7,346	24.3
Ridgewood, Bushwick	6th to 8th	3,977	24.0
	9th to 12th	2,733	53.7

SOURCE: *New York City Department of Education: Individual student attendance data, 2012-13. Analysis done by the Center for New York City Affairs.*

Students with 0 to 9 absences		Students with 10 to 17 absences		CHRONIC ABSENCE[3] Students with 18 to 35 absences		SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENCE[4] Students with 36 or more absences	
Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
5,152	48.4	2,877	27.0	1,862	17.5	747	7.0
3,388	54.8	1,437	23.3	924	15.0	431	7.0
4,121	49.0	1,546	18.4	1,242	14.8	1,495	17.8
4,742	53.8	2,284	25.9	1,364	15.5	417	4.7
2,573	58.6	1,006	22.9	589	13.4	226	5.1
1,437	31.2	1,001	21.8	913	19.8	1,249	27.2
5,053	41.0	3,635	29.5	2,714	22.0	919	7.5
2,395	43.0	1,471	26.4	1,179	21.2	527	9.5
1,790	28.2	1,345	21.2	1,271	20.0	1,946	30.6
16,361	70.5	4,702	20.3	1,828	7.9	325	1.4
7,800	70.7	2,048	18.6	899	8.2	281	2.5
6,486	50.9	2,388	18.7	1,556	12.2	2,308	18.1
6,518	51.6	3,581	28.3	2,002	15.8	543	4.3
4,719	57.3	2,083	25.3	1,082	13.1	358	4.3
5,662	46.5	2,699	22.2	1,822	15.0	1,986	16.3
10,403	58.6	4,838	27.2	2,061	11.6	461	2.6
4,051	58.5	1,731	25.0	871	12.6	276	4.0
6,085	59.3	2,012	19.6	1,068	10.4	1,089	10.6
1,679	32.0	1,473	28.1	1,415	27.0	678	12.9
1,540	44.2	910	26.1	681	19.5	354	10.2
467	23.8	345	17.6	398	20.3	751	38.3
19,528	65.5	6,980	23.4	2,845	9.5	444	1.5
8,042	64.7	2,796	22.5	1,243	10.0	351	2.8
7,049	51.9	2,674	19.7	1,761	13.0	2,094	15.4
11,602	69.2	3,574	21.3	1,378	8.2	217	1.3
5,316	68.4	1,558	20.0	706	9.1	195	2.5
4,658	42.5	2,174	19.9	1,698	15.5	2,422	22.1
7,917	74.1	2,162	20.2	561	5.3	43	0.4
4,571	78.7	927	16.0	280	4.8	31	0.5
7,956	53.9	3,239	21.9	1,881	12.7	1,688	11.4
10,423	47.3	6,739	30.6	3,861	17.5	1,018	4.6
5,319	47.1	3,306	29.3	1,912	16.9	758	6.7
3,096	27.5	2,654	23.6	2,385	21.2	3,126	27.8
9,228	55.1	4,749	28.4	2,266	13.5	503	3.0
4,227	58.3	1,773	24.4	916	12.6	337	4.6
7,316	51.3	3,141	22.0	2,070	14.5	1,734	12.2
8,380	53.8	4,297	27.6	2,278	14.6	609	3.9
4,306	57.9	1,848	24.8	955	12.8	330	4.4
1,603	41.3	916	23.6	729	18.8	632	16.3
11,811	61.1	5,068	26.2	2,051	10.6	403	2.1
6,469	65.4	2,292	23.2	885	9.0	240	2.4
5,046	48.8	2,315	22.4	1,450	14.0	1,538	14.9
14,424	50.9	8,744	30.9	4,178	14.7	995	3.5
6,099	48.0	3,834	30.2	2,083	16.4	690	5.4
8,742	49.5	4,326	24.5	2,506	14.2	2,099	11.9
3,634	49.5	1,924	26.2	1,317	17.9	471	6.4
1,994	50.1	1,028	25.8	665	16.7	290	7.3
741	27.1	524	19.2	589	21.6	879	32.2

FOOTNOTES: *1. Neighborhoods provided for an approximate location. Not all neighborhoods are included.*
2. Numbers represent all students within the given district. Grade PK excluded. Charter schools excluded.
3. National researchers define chronic absence as missing more than 10 percent of the school year.
4. National researchers define severe chronic absence as missing more than 20 percent of the school year.
5. Rounding accounts for tiny errors in the percent sums.

THE SCHOOLS TO WATCH: ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN NYC

Efforts to curb chronic absenteeism in New York City should start in schools where the problem is most virulent. The chart below lists the elementary and K-8 schools In New York City where one-third or more of students were chronically absent in 2012-13. In general, pass rates on the state's Common Core-aligned tests are low in these schools and risk load rates are high. Only 10 schools out of 142 had pass rates above 20 percent on the state's 2012-13 ELA exams. In math, only 18 schools had pass rates above 20 percent. Nearly every school with these high levels of absenteeism was challenged with nine or more risk factors, and a majority had more than 12. As is always the case, there were interesting exceptions to note. Two schools had chronic absenteeism rates above 40 percent and more than 13 risk factors yet managed to post Common Core test pass rate above 24 percent, a notable achievement and worthy of further study. In general, however, the numbers show a consistent pattern linking chronic absenteeism to high risk loads and often very poor academic results. (Due to space constraints, this chart does not include all of the risk factor data. See www.centernyc.org for complete numbers.)

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WHERE ONE-THIRD OR MORE OF STUDENTS WERE CHRONICALLY ABSENT: SCHOOL YEAR 2012-13

DISTRICT	SCHOOL NAME	GRADE	CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM 2012-2013	PASSING COMMON CORE ELA EXAM 2012-13	PASSING COMMON CORE MATH EXAM 2012-2013	POVERTY RATE IN ZONE 2010	AVERAGE YEARS OF EDUCATION IN ZONE 2010	PERCENT OF ADULT PROFESSIONALS IN ZONE 2010
21	PS 188 MICHAEL E. BERDY	K-5	53%	12%	13%	88%	13.7	42%
9	PS 230 DR. ROLAND N. PATTERSON	K-5	51%	10%	9%	99%	12	20%
27	PS 106	K-5	48%	31%	13%	91%	12.4	25%
15	RED HOOK NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL	K-5	47%	13%	15%	NA	NA	NA
19	PS 190 SHEFFIELD	K-6	46%	11%	14%	94%	11.8	17%
12	PS 6 WEST FARMS	K-6	45%	8%	10%	94%	10.9	21%
13	PS 256 BENJAMIN BANNEKER	K-5	45%	19%	22%	83%	12.3	27%
17	PS 191 PAUL ROBESON	K-5	44%	14%	13%	93%	12.2	21%
13	PS 270 JOHANN DEKALB	K-6	44%	10%	15%	96%	13.6	43%
19	PS 158 WARWICK	K-5	44%	10%	11%	91%	12.1	22%
9	PS 132 GARRET A. MORGAN	K-5	43%	5%	4%	94%	10.8	17%
9	PS 58	1-5	43%	7%	11%	93%	11.2	15%
7	PS 65 MOTHER HALE ACADEMY	K-5	42%	11%	14%	93%	10.8	13%
16	PS 335 GRANVILLE T. WOODS	K-5	42%	11%	10%	99%	11.1	15%
4	PS 38 ROBERTO CLEMENTE	K-5	42%	8%	6%	92%	12.3	32%
5	PS 30 HERNANDEZ/HUGHES	K-5	42%	11%	8%	90%	11.8	31%
8	PS 138 SAMUEL RANDALL	K-5	41%	18%	13%	87%	12.4	30%
9	PS 53 BASHEER QUISIM	K-5	41%	24%	28%	93%	10.6	11%
27	WATERSIDE CHILDREN'S STUDIO SCHOOL	K-5	41%	18%	13%	NA	NA	NA
16	PS 25 EUBIE BLAKE SCHOOL	K-5	41%	13%	12%	98%	12.2	28%
12	PS 92 BRONX	K-5	41%	5%	4%	82%	11.4	17%
8	PS 107	K-5	40%	7%	7%	85%	11.4	23%
5	PS 197 JOHN B. RUSSWURM	K-5	40%	7%	5%	88%	13.3	38%
27	PS 104 THE BAYS WATER	K-5	40%	19%	27%	92%	13.1	35%
5	PS 125 RALPH BUNCHE	K-5	40%	24%	36%	88%	14.6	58%
5	PS 194 COUNTEE CULLEN	K-5	40%	1%	1%	90%	12.5	26%
17	PS 12 DR. JACQUELINE PEEK-DAVIS	K-5	40%	8%	10%	96%	12.1	16%
11	PS 112 BRONXWOOD	K-5	39%	5%	2%	92%	11.6	27%
8	PS 140 EAGLE	K-5	39%	8%	11%	83%	10.9	20%
10	PS 9 RYER AVENUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	K-5	39%	9%	14%	NA	NA	NA
16	BRIGHTER CHOICE COMMUNITY SCHOOL	K-5	39%	37%	22%	NA	NA	NA
5	PS 133 FRED R. MOORE	K-6	39%	9%	5%	89%	13.4	43%
10	PS 59 THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL OF TECHNOLOGY	K-5	39%	6%	14%	96%	11.1	15%
14	PS 59 WILLIAM FLOYD	K-5	38%	10%	9%	98%	10.7	15%
13	PS 287 BAILEY K. ASHFORD	K-5	38%	8%	11%	93%	12.5	38%
7	PS 157 GROVE HILL	K-6	38%	12%	16%	94%	11.3	28%
12	PS 50 CLARA BARTON	3-5	38%	8%	8%	98%	11	20%
10	PS 85 GREAT EXPECTATIONS	K-5	38%	6%	7%	95%	11.2	11%
10	PS 91 BRONX	K-5	38%	16%	22%	93%	11.2	10%
13	PS 305 DR. PETER RAY	K-5	38%	10%	16%	83%	12.6	32%
32	PS 299 THOMAS WARREN FIELD	K-5	37%	16%	25%	88%	11.5	19%
27	PS 253	K-5	37%	13%	21%	95%	12.8	33%
16	PS 81 THADDEUS STEVENS	K-5	37%	17%	22%	94%	11.1	21%
23	PS 156 WAVERLY	K-5	37%	17%	15%	88%	11.8	16%
13	PS 46 EDWARD C. BLUM	K-5	37%	16%	20%	95%	12.4	41%
15	PS 15 PATRICK F. DALY	K-5	37%	10%	18%	94%	11.8	39%
32	PS 75 MAYDA CORTIELLA	K-5	37%	13%	10%	86%	11.3	18%
31	PS 31 WILLIAM T. DAVIS	K-5	37%	10%	15%	90%	13	39%
13	PS 67 CHARLES A. DORSEY	K-5	37%	7%	7%	97%	11.5	20%
31	PS 14 CORNELIUS VANDERBILT	4-5	37%	10%	10%	87%	12.6	25%
12	PS 44 DAVID C. FARRAGUT	K-5	36%	15%	19%	96%	11.5	18%

PERCENT OF UNEMPLOYED MALES IN ZONE 2010	PUBLIC HOUSING IN ZONE 2011	HOMELESS SHELTER IN ZONE 2011	STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE LUNCH 2012-2013	STUDENTS IN TEMP HOUSING 2012-2013	STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR HRA BENEFITS 2012-2013	TEACHER TURNOVER 2011-2012	STUDENT TURNOVER 2010-2011	TOTAL RISK FACTORS
26%	YES	NO	82%	15%	73%	7%	27%	12
35%	YES	NO	93%	9%	82%	17%	37%	14
25%	YES	NO	87%	13%	77%	12%	15%	13
NA	NA	NA	88%	15%	76%	21%	41%	10
28%	NO	NO	91%	20%	69%	25%	47%	11
46%	YES	NO	93%	17%	79%	19%	27%	16
31%	YES	NO	91%	20%	75%	10%	21%	12
37%	YES	YES	94%	29%	75%	18%	24%	16
29%	YES	NO	83%	14%	68%	16%	20%	13
35%	YES	NO	91%	14%	76%	7%	24%	13
38%	YES	NO	89%	16%	76%	6%	36%	14
29%	NO	YES	86%	19%	79%	14%	14%	15
44%	YES	YES	97%	28%	80%	37%	29%	18
40%	YES	NO	88%	17%	70%	21%	33%	16
25%	YES	NO	89%	32%	71%	18%	28%	14
38%	YES	NO	90%	23%	72%	22%	36%	15
27%	YES	NO	83%	19%	70%	16%	18%	12
32%	YES	YES	88%	30%	77%	12%	16%	13
NA	NA	NA	77%	19%	63%	14%	32%	6
36%	YES	YES	90%	34%	78%	27%	31%	16
36%	NO	YES	87%	23%	78%	21%	30%	16
38%	NO	NO	91%	15%	72%	8%	21%	14
31%	YES	YES	83%	26%	75%	16%	11%	12
21%	NO	NO	80%	14%	62%	4%	30%	9
30%	YES	NO	89%	14%	67%	33%	32%	14
38%	YES	YES	90%	34%	76%	19%	39%	18
35%	YES	NO	90%	20%	76%	8%	19%	15
42%	YES	NO	95%	13%	77%	8%	18%	10
46%	YES	YES	88%	18%	73%	7%	19%	14
NA	NA	NA	88%	24%	77%	16%	13%	10
NA	NA	NA	74%	18%	70%	14%	17%	6
28%	YES	YES	83%	24%	69%	19%	50%	16
20%	NO	YES	96%	22%	81%	9%	26%	15
53%	YES	NO	88%	11%	77%	7%	12%	12
36%	YES	NO	84%	24%	70%	10%	30%	11
35%	YES	YES	89%	17%	73%	24%	26%	14
40%	NO	NO	83%	11%	70%	17%	43%	14
28%	YES	YES	94%	25%	79%	4%	27%	16
26%	NO	YES	92%	22%	72%	19%	26%	15
33%	YES	NO	85%	12%	73%	21%	16%	13
27%	YES	NO	90%	22%	74%	17%	33%	16
28%	YES	NO	90%	6%	73%	7%	26%	8
28%	YES	NO	88%	23%	77%	15%	17%	13
45%	YES	YES	83%	21%	65%	14%	20%	14
43%	YES	YES	85%	23%	76%	18%	21%	13
28%	YES	NO	86%	17%	72%	13%	39%	11
24%	YES	NO	80%	12%	73%	10%	10%	12
32%	YES	NO	83%	18%	79%	9%	28%	10
63%	YES	YES	97%	16%	81%	6%	7%	15
28%	YES	NO	86%	12%	75%	10%	24%	14
40%	NO	YES	92%	24%	78%	8%	24%	14

CHART CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WHERE ONE-THIRD OR MORE OF STUDENTS WERE CHRONICALLY ABSENT: SCHOOL YEAR 2012-13 *(continued)*

DISTRICT	SCHOOL NAME	GRADE	CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM 2012-2013	PASSING COMMON CORE ELA EXAM 2012-13	PASSING COMMON CORE MATH EXAM 2012-2013	POVERTY RATE IN ZONE 2010	AVERAGE YEARS OF EDUCATION IN ZONE 2010	PERCENT OF ADULT PROFESSIONALS IN ZONE 2010
11	PS 78 ANNE HUTCHINSON	K-5	36%	13%	13%	86%	12.6	26%
18	PS 272 CURTIS ESTABROOK	K-5	36%	12%	10%	86%	13	35%
4	PS 112 JOSE CELSO BARBOSA	K-2	36%	17%	23%	NA	NA	NA
13	PS 93 WILLIAM H. PRESCOTT	K-5	36%	19%	19%	86%	12.9	32%
19	PS 13 ROBERTO CLEMENTE	K-5	36%	20%	15%	90%	11.9	24%
1	PS 64 ROBERT SIMON	K-6	35%	10%	10%	NA	NA	NA
23	PS 332 CHARLES H. HOUSTON	4-5	35%	8%	4%	86%	11.9	22%
12	PS 57 CRESCENT	K-5	35%	17%	11%	96%	11.2	14%
12	PS 134 GEORGE F. BRISTOW	K-5	35%	18%	14%	98%	11.5	19%
8	PS 75 SCHOOL OF RESEARCH AND DISCOVERY	K-5	35%	17%	23%	97%	10.3	15%
28	PS 40 SAMUEL HUNTINGTON	K-5	35%	8%	13%	95%	12.1	25%
12	PS 67 MOHEGAN SCHOOL	K-5	35%	12%	9%	95%	10.6	19%
11	PS 21 PHILLIP H. SHERIDAN	K-5	35%	13%	13%	87%	12.5	26%
17	PS 22	5	35%	11%	3%	100%	13	36%
13	PS 44 MARCUS GARVEY	K-5	35%	17%	14%	94%	12.8	33%
31	PS 74 FUTURE LEADERS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	K-3	35%	5%	0%	NA	NA	NA
16	PS 5 DR. RONALD MCNAIR	K-5	35%	9%	16%	90%	12.7	27%
18	PS 114 RYDER ELEMENTARY	K-5	35%	18%	8%	84%	11.4	22%
31	PS 44 THOMAS C. BROWN	K-5	35%	10%	12%	86%	12.6	26%
5	PS 36 MARGARET DOUGLAS	K-5	35%	9%	15%	NA	NA	NA
31	PS 57 HUBERT H. HUMPHREY	K-5	35%	16%	13%	92%	12.8	26%
3	PS 242 YOUNG DIPLOMATS MAGNET ACADEMY	K-5	34%	12%	9%	69%	14	47%
7	PS 18 JOHN PETER ZENGER	K-5	34%	8%	11%	88%	10.3	18%
9	PS 70 MAX SCHOENFELD	K-5	34%	5%	8%	86%	10.8	15%
8	THE ACADEMY OF THE ARTS	K-5	34%	10%	13%	93%	10.5	14%
9	PS 42 CLAREMONT	K-5	34%	7%	8%	93%	10.7	13%
14	PS 23 CARTER C. WOODSON	K-5	34%	9%	14%	96%	11.8	22%
8	PS 130 ABRAM STEVENS HEWITT	K-5	34%	9%	11%	96%	10.7	12%
13	PS 307 DANIEL HALE WILLIAMS	K-5	34%	10%	18%	81%	11.9	30%
11	PS 103 HECTOR FONTANEZ	K-6	34%	12%	8%	88%	12	25%
7	PS 30 WILTON	K-5	34%	7%	7%	98%	10.8	13%
13	PS 56 LEWIS H. LATIMER	K-5	34%	24%	38%	89%	14.2	50%
9	PS 73 BRONX	K-5	34%	6%	5%	97%	11.6	16%
8	PS 72 DR. WILLIAM DORNEY	K-6	34%	16%	29%	79%	13	33%
21	PS 329 SURFSIDE	K-5	34%	23%	18%	92%	11.8	20%
8	PS 333 THE MUSEUM SCHOOL	K-5	34%	6%	5%	87%	10.5	14%
19	PS 149 DANNY KAYE	K-5	34%	11%	17%	97%	11.8	21%
5	PS 175 HENRY H. GARNET	K-5	34%	12%	15%	91%	12.9	41%
7	PS 43 JONAS BRONCK	K-5	34%	13%	12%	99%	11	15%
3	PS 185 JEARLY CHILDHOOD DISCOVERY AND DESIGN	K-2	34%	8%	8%	NA	NA	NA
21	PS 90 EDNA COHEN SCHOOL	K-5	33%	22%	23%	88%	12.4	23%
17	PS 289 GEORGE V. BROWER	K-5	33%	18%	24%	90%	12.9	28%
15	PS 38 THE PACIFIC	K-5	33%	27%	30%	74%	14.4	58%
17	PS 398 WALTER WEAVER	K-5	33%	13%	9%	99%	12.3	23%
8	PS 62 INOCENSIO CASANOVA	K-5	33%	11%	13%	96%	10.9	13%
11	PS 111 SETON FALLS	K-5	33%	8%	13%	86%	12.8	32%
5	PS 92 MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE	K-5	33%	14%	13%	86%	12.9	38%
14	PS 297 ABRAHAM STOCKTON	K-5	33%	15%	19%	89%	10	14%
32	PS 151 LYNDON B. JOHNSON	K-5	33%	11%	15%	95%	11.5	20%
14	PS 147 ISSAC REMSEN	K-5	33%	18%	18%	89%	11.7	37%
9	PS 199 THE SHAKESPEARE SCHOOL	K-5	33%	21%	19%	99%	11.4	13%
3	PS 145 BLOOMINGDALE SCHOOL	K-5	33%	8%	9%	87%	14.3	62%
8	PS 146 EDWARD COLLINS	K-5	33%	12%	7%	97%	10.8	24%

SOURCE: *See page 13 for a list of risk factors data sources. Analysis done by the Center for New York City Affairs.*

NOTE: *In K-3 schools, the pass rates for the state tests were determined by the 3rd grade test scores of the schools' former 2nd grade students.*

PERCENT OF UNEMPLOYED MALES IN ZONE 2010	PUBLIC HOUSING IN ZONE 2011	HOMELESS SHELTER IN ZONE 2011	STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE LUNCH 2012-2013	STUDENTS IN TEMP HOUSING 2012-2013	STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR HRA BENEFITS 2012-2013	TEACHER TURNOVER 2011-2012	STUDENT TURNOVER 2010-2011	TOTAL RISK FACTORS
27%	NO	YES	78%	9%	59%	15%	25%	13
33%	YES	NO	70%	10%	60%	13%	25%	11
NA	NA	NA	86%	14%	63%	11%	39%	4
30%	NO	YES	89%	14%	75%	4%	22%	12
32%	NO	YES	91%	20%	75%	19%	28%	15
NA	NA	NA	75%	15%	65%	29%	43%	7
40%	YES	YES	92%	26%	79%	44%	11%	17
45%	YES	NO	86%	19%	71%	21%	27%	15
34%	NO	NO	92%	12%	76%	9%	38%	13
39%	YES	NO	90%	23%	73%	10%	35%	13
37%	NO	NO	89%	13%	67%	5%	11%	11
31%	NO	YES	89%	15%	74%	6%	5%	15
24%	NO	NO	81%	13%	66%	11%	19%	12
30%	NO	NO	93%	23%	65%	22%	20%	12
30%	NO	NO	91%	14%	72%	0%	12%	9
NA	NA	NA	85%	14%	63%	NA	NA	6
38%	YES	NO	77%	28%	66%	11%	24%	12
24%	NO	NO	69%	12%	59%	33%	19%	11
30%	YES	NO	91%	10%	72%	7%	33%	12
NA	NA	NA	81%	9%	69%	6%	15%	7
25%	NO	NO	83%	8%	71%	6%	34%	10
31%	YES	YES	80%	30%	68%	20%	30%	13
36%	YES	NO	91%	18%	74%	33%	0%	15
25%	NO	YES	96%	21%	81%	10%	16%	11
31%	YES	NO	88%	28%	79%	0%	26%	14
41%	YES	YES	97%	26%	78%	42%	27%	18
41%	YES	NO	89%	21%	75%	26%	31%	15
23%	YES	YES	90%	17%	73%	28%	25%	13
31%	YES	NO	85%	11%	72%	7%	38%	12
21%	NO	NO	81%	10%	63%	8%	13%	8
36%	YES	NO	90%	21%	78%	11%	26%	11
18%	NO	NO	86%	18%	61%	12%	32%	7
30%	YES	YES	92%	16%	81%	14%	24%	17
18%	YES	NO	75%	11%	58%	6%	26%	10
35%	YES	NO	90%	10%	78%	11%	23%	15
31%	YES	NO	82%	39%	78%	25%	14%	13
35%	YES	YES	88%	21%	71%	6%	18%	15
24%	YES	YES	90%	29%	76%	19%	31%	13
39%	YES	NO	96%	14%	75%	15%	32%	13
NA	NA	NA	87%	14%	74%	20%	12%	3
34%	YES	NO	79%	17%	69%	21%	16%	13
32%	YES	YES	82%	14%	66%	18%	25%	15
20%	YES	NO	67%	11%	51%	15%	18%	8
31%	YES	NO	88%	21%	69%	22%	44%	16
24%	NO	YES	91%	19%	76%	8%	26%	11
25%	YES	YES	86%	11%	63%	9%	35%	13
26%	YES	NO	90%	21%	76%	17%	33%	11
43%	YES	NO	83%	15%	74%	7%	31%	15
29%	NO	YES	92%	12%	73%	21%	29%	15
23%	YES	NO	90%	15%	74%	33%	41%	12
36%	NO	YES	95%	21%	79%	17%	25%	14
19%	YES	YES	76%	27%	66%	3%	34%	13
43%	YES	NO	92%	16%	77%	27%	11%	11

SOURCES AND RESOURCES

The following books and articles provided valuable background for this report. Many are cited in the text. Others are important works on attendance, community school supports or the relationship between poverty and education. All are excellent sources of additional information.

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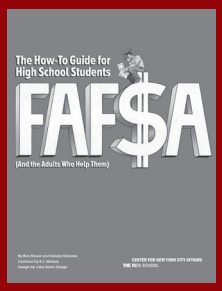
BIG DREAMS FOR NEW YORK CITY'S YOUNGEST CHILDREN: *THE FUTURE OF EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION*

In October 2012, New York City launched EarlyLearnNYC, a plan that would upend its system for providing subsidized child care to working-class and low-income families. The goal was to take the city's sprawling assortment of child care programs and blend them into a unified, holistic spectrum of early education services for children from six weeks through their fourth year. Two years in, the results are mixed. This report draws on dozens of interviews and program observations, providing a series of recommendations for reform. Published July 2014.



FAFSA*:* *THE HOW-TO GUIDE FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS (AND THE ADULTS WHO HELP THEM)*

Filling out the FAFSA form is often the first step for students seeking financial support to go to college. Understanding the form and handling it confidently is crucial for college matriculation and success. This "how-to" guide was written in partnership with New York City's most experienced college guidance and financial aid professionals. It addresses the most common questions of New York City students and families. The guide is easy to read and engaging for both students and adults. We hope it will demystify the FAFSA and make it less intimidating. Published January 2014.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

In 2008, the Center for New York City Affairs published a widely discussed report revealing that one in every five elementary school students in the city was chronically absent from school, missing the equivalent of a month or more of their school year. The city jumped into action and the picture has improved. But the numbers are still staggering: some 87,000 children from grades K to 5 were chronically absent in the 2012–13 school year. More than one-quarter of New York City's elementary schools still struggle with high absenteeism rates—and test scores that remain stubbornly low.

Significantly, this is a problem that plagues New York City's lowest-income communities. This report reviews what in the city's response to this problem has worked and why. The report also dives deep into the reality of elementary and K to 8 schools that serve New York City's highest-poverty students, identifying the schools struggling with high rates of absenteeism year after year and measuring the risk factors associated with high poverty. We found the constellation of public schools plagued by persistent chronic absenteeism closely correlates with schools bearing the largest risk loads—those where poverty's effects are most overwhelming for families and educators. This research has important implications for Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration and others who are searching for ways to better support children in low-income schools. We offer a tool for identifying New York City's highest-needs schools. And we discuss how the city's new community schools initiative might be most helpful to schools dealing with persistently high chronic absenteeism and other poverty-related issues.

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