

Rationale

It seems like common sense; being in school on a regular basis matters. This may explain why student attendance has long been a low-level goal for policy makers and educators. In the last several decades, intense focus and criticism on education systems have decreased public, and, more importantly, parental perceptions of the value of what is going on in schools. This coupled with the focus on student data collection, education outcomes, and federal, state, and local goals of closing achievement gaps has led to renewed interest and research around the impact of attendance. Current research tells us this measure is a better indicator to identify and to address the needs of our students than test scores. When policies and plans are enacted to address student needs using chronic absenteeism data, the wider community can be engaged and factors contributing to the achievement gap that go beyond a schools control can be addressed.

Currently, the state of Florida has not placed a priority on using chronic absenteeism as an accountability measure or to address it in policy. Consequently, consistent and valid data collection is not yet possible. The Florida PTA can help lead the way to better state, district, and school policies on attendance, educating communities about the impact of student absenteeism, and potentially help unlock an indicator that would help advance the mission of PTA to help every child reach their potential.

Chronic Absenteeism: Understanding The Impact of Missing Instruction

Whereas, Chronic absenteeism is a measure of how many students miss, for any reason, a defined number of school days which put the student at academic risk. Using chronic absenteeism as a metric emphasizes the academic impact of missing any school days. Community-based, positive strategies have been found to best address attendance trends and are more effective than the antiquated truancy approaches which were largely punitive and focused solely on students' unexcused absences. [1] [2] [3]

Whereas, the availability of chronic absence data has expanded dramatically in recent years. In 2013-14, the Civil Rights Data Collection began tracking chronic absence and defined it as missing 15 or more days of school. Passed in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires all states to annually report on chronic absence data. Additionally, 36 states and the District of Columbia, not including Florida, adopted chronic absence as a school accountability metric in their ESSA state implementation plans. Currently, most states and EDEFACTS, an initiative of the Department of Education, define chronic absence as missing 10 percent of the school year. The increased use of chronic absence for reporting and accountability is prompting the development of real-time local-level reports. Since state education agencies are required to collect attendance data, they are best able to provide districts with longitudinal data that can improve cross district information. They can also publicly report rates of chronic absence to uncover and to reverse any systemic absentee problems and provide support and incentives to address absentee problems at the local level. [1] [4][5][6]

Whereas, during the 2015-16 school year, over 7 million students (15.5% of all students) were chronically absent, in the United States. For this time period, chronic absences was defined as missing 15 or more days of school. This is an increase of roughly 790,000 students from 2013-2014. Approximately 800 school districts reported more than 30% of their students were chronically absent. For the same time period, the chronic absentee rate in the state of Florida was 506,800 students, 18.1% of the 2.8 million Florida public school students. The same year, fifteen counties in Florida reported more than 30% of their students were chronically absent, and 57 of 67 county school districts reported more than 15% of their students were chronically absent. [7] [8] [9]

Whereas, missing even 2 days of school per month for any reason can be devastating at every grade level (Pre-K - 12), falls within the definition of chronic absenteeism, and is a better indicator for student outcomes than test scores. For example, children who are chronically absent in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade are much less likely to read at grade level by the third grade. In middle and high school, chronic absenteeism increases the likelihood of failing courses and highly correlates with lower standardized test scores. Irregular attendance in secondary schools is a better predictor than test scores of whether students will drop out before graduation. Academic implications of chronic absenteeism are exponentially greater for marginalized students across the country. Yet, nearly 49% of parents falsely believe there is no negative impact on their children if three or more days of school are missed per month. [1] [8] [10] [11]

Whereas, nationwide approximately 27 percent of teachers missed more than 10 school days in the 2015-2016 school year, for any reason including training, and research shows that teacher absenteeism equates to a one-to-one ratio between absences and learning losses. Also, students whose teacher misses 10 days of school struggle in math and are less engaged in school. Like student chronic absenteeism, understanding the factors behind the research findings is important for each state, district,

and school to keep students on their academic path and engaged in school. Teacher absenteeism rates also can be indicators of issues with school climate, substitute teacher support and training policies, and policies mitigating teacher absences. [12] [13] [14][15]

Be it Resolved, that Florida PTA and its constituent associations build public awareness and consensus at all levels with community partners and stakeholders to address chronic absence of students and teachers, and to encourage research of the community's impact (e.g. academic, economic) on students' and teachers' attendance, and be it

Resolved, that the Florida PTA and its constituent associations advocate for local and state policies or legislation that sets a common definition for chronic absence and criteria to determine attendance during non-crisis and crisis periods such as a pandemic or post-hurricane, promotes monitoring, reports data transparently, and requires schools and districts to address high levels of chronic absence with plans, and be it

Resolved, that the Florida PTA and its constituent associations urge the State of Florida, its school districts, schools, and communities to identify contributing factors to absenteeism, and to create and prioritize a policy to include community based, positive strategies improving attendance.

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