

ATTENDANCE

Brunsma, D. L., & Rockquemore, K. A. (1998). Effects of student uniforms on attendance, behavior problems, substance use, and academic achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 92(1), 53-62.

The purpose of this study was to clarify and illuminate whether student uniforms have an effect on attendance, student achievement and behavior. Researchers also present an analysis of the arguments proposed by uniform advocates to provide critical insight into the debate on the effects of school uniform policies.

According to these researchers there has been a decade-long debate on public school policies that require school uniforms for students. Advocates of student uniforms are influenced by a body of research that describes the comparative effectiveness of private schools vs. public schools in terms of student behavior and achievement. This has led some school reformers to consider policies that are linked to private and Catholic school success, student uniforms being the most visible.

The case study cited most often by uniform advocates in the political rhetoric surrounding the uniform debate is that of California's Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) (Polacheck, 1996). LBUSD was one of the first large urban school districts within the United States to adopt a mandatory school uniform policy. That case is relevant to the uniform debate because it is a prime example of a system that (a) has recently instituted a school uniform requirement, (b) has received national attention, and (c) attributes students' behavioral changes to the mandatory uniform policy.

Opponents of student uniform policies question the basic assumptions of those who advocate for those policies and stress the legal, financial, and questionable analyses of the effectiveness of their implementation. For example, within the Catholic school literature, school uniforms have never been acknowledged as a primary factor in producing a "Catholic school effect" (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993, pp. 286-287). They report that while it is assumed that all Catholic schools have uniform policies, in reality only 65.4% of them have such policies. Furthermore, a close reading of the public school versus private school literature (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987) suggests that uniforms are merely symbolic of the communal organization and shared values of Catholic school communities, which is the fundamental reason for the advantages that Catholic schools provide.

Nevertheless, since public school administrators consider creating uniform policies to improve student attendance and achievement, researchers conducted the present study because they believed it is important for future school reform efforts to clarify and illuminate the effect of a student uniform policy. They felt it was important to call attention to and to warn against school reform efforts that extract research results superficially.

Findings indicated that student uniforms have no direct effect on substance use, behavioral problems, or attendance, and it was shown that uniform policies had a

negative effect on student academic achievement. While uniform policies may indirectly affect school environment and student outcomes by providing a visible and public symbol of commitment to school improvement and reform, this study did not find a statistical causal relationship. In other words they concluded that student uniforms had no direct effect on behavioral problems, attendance or achievement.

School decision makers may make use of the cautions these researchers note concerning superficially interpreting research results and in particular extrapolating the effect of school uniform policies from studies of Catholic schools. They suggest that school uniforms might indirectly affect attendance, student outcomes and community support for change by providing a visible and symbolic commitment to school improvement and reform. In this regard it can be viewed positively. However, they warn that the adoption of a uniform policy as a single reform effort may foster thinking that there is a quick fix to school reform. In this regard it may undermine a commitment to policies that are costly and demand energy and a willingness to change on the part of school faculty and parents. In other words symbolic representations of change are a good thing but symbols are not to be confused with the agents that cause real change.

There is another caution to be found in this study. School officials who advocated for uniforms were confronted with aggressive resistance due to the appearance of inequality or injustice. They needed to spend time not with issues of teaching and learning but in quelling formidable resistance. Since change requires an abundance of time, persistence and resources, the assumptions underlying the change effort should be valid and able to be substantiated.

Durán-Narucki, V. (2008). School building condition, school attendance, and academic achievement in New York City public schools: A mediation model. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 28(3), 278-286.

This study illuminates the role that the condition of school facilities plays in academic outcomes. The author examines the role of the physical environment in academic outcomes specifically looking at the condition of a school as a significant element in the relationship between the person and his or her environment. The author posits that this relationship bears great relevance for the intellectual processes that take place because developmental and learning processes occur not only in a specific school with specific characteristics; but the characteristics of the school itself is an intrinsic part of these processes.

After controlling for SES, ethnicity, school size and teacher quality, the researcher found that there is a relationship between school buildings, attendance and academic achievement. The results of this study indicate that the relationship between school building condition and English Language Arts was fully mediated by attendance, and the relationship between school building condition and mathematics scores was partially mediated by attendance.

It is explained that there are at least three levels at which the condition of academic facilities might affect the performance of students. First, at the material level, the condition of the school building directly impedes children's learning.

A second level is that of social interaction. The daily interactions between all the users of the school are affected by the conditions of the school building. Run down buildings are not good places to work or to learn, and this may play a part in both the number of days students attend and the quality of the teaching processes.

A third level could be designated an “environmental meaning” level. School walls, floors, toilet stalls, etc. in disrepair are not only physical phenomena, they are also conditions created in social and cultural contexts that produce collective and individual meaning.

Within this proposed theoretical model, it is reasoned that the quality of schools as environments specifically created for learning is then related to the quality of the learning activities that take place in them. This is an interactive process between the user and the environment in which the quality of the environment is essential to the quality of the activities that take place in it. Through this process, children can learn not only appropriate behaviors and concepts, but also about their place in the world.

The author further explores poor urban environments and concomitant risk factors as a social justice problem. She cites further research studies that document that students in poverty are at higher risk for socio-emotional difficulties and that exposure to environmental stressors is linked to deficits in task performance and to experiencing learned helplessness, which affect academic success.

The methodology of this study developed originally by Baron and Kenny (1986)¹, looking at school attendance for mediating the relationship between school building condition and academic achievement. Controlling for SES, ethnicity, school size and teacher quality (certification and turnover), a regression analysis was used to analyze effects.

The findings of this study raise questions regarding social justice in the education of poor, urban youth of color. It is reasoned that the condition of school buildings is not randomly assigned. Poor, minority children are more likely to attend schools in disrepair. If the school building condition is important in the education of urban students of color, then the creation of school buildings that provide safe havens for children could be a very effective way in which their education can be improved. Fixing school buildings could send a strong message to students and teachers that they play a significant role in the progress of society. Public school buildings embody the interest and investment that a community has in education and in the future of their children, and the condition of the public school communicates the special purpose of public education.

¹ R.M. Baron, D.A. Kenny. **The moderator–mediator distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations** *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51 (6) (1986), pp. 1173-1182.

This study may prove useful to researchers who are looking for a methodology that controls multiple variables in order to determine relationships between co-variants. In addition this study discusses lawsuits that were settled as a result of the relationship of school buildings in disrepair with achievement results and develops an argument between issues of achievement and social justice.

Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 95(5), 308-318.

Dropping out of school, although defined by a single event, reflects a long process of disengagement first indicated by absenteeism at the elementary level. Researchers propose that dropping out must be addressed as a preventive measure by improving attendance and decreasing chronic absenteeism at the elementary level. These researchers sought to identify practices that improved student attendance at the elementary level. Specifically they sought to identify what schools can do to increase and sustain students' daily attendance and how family-school-community partnerships may contribute to this goal.

Survey data were collected during the 1995–1997 school years on schools' rates of daily student attendance and chronic absenteeism and on specific partnership practices that were implemented to help increase or sustain student attendance. The schools surveyed were from the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS), a consortium of schools supported by Johns Hopkins University. The results of this particular study: "Focus on Results — Study of Student Attendance — is reported here.

This study involves NNPS elementary schools that were working to develop school, family, and community partnerships to improve student attendance. Respondents returned a series of surveys designed to explore the relationships between school attendance policies, school practices to involve parents, and changing rates of student attendance. The 12 elementary schools included 5 rural and 7 urban schools.

The study suggests that schools are more likely to improve student attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism with three broad strategies: (a) taking a comprehensive approach to attendance with activities that involve students, families, and the community; (b) using positive involvement activities rather than negative or punishing activities; and (c) sustaining a focus on improving attendance over time.

Specific data were reported on each school's average daily attendance rate for 3 consecutive school years: 1995, 1996, and 1997. Average daily attendance rates were: 1995 = 93.08%, 1996 = 93.22 and 1997 = 94.16. (The national rate is 94.8%.) Average attendance rates increased each year, especially during the 1997 school year when the schools focused on improving school attendance. Prior to their focus on attendance, the schools reported an average increase in daily attendance of 0.12% from 1995 to 1996. After focusing on student attendance between the 1996 and 1997 school years, the schools reported an increase of 0.71% in average daily attendance.

In addition to daily attendance rates, schools also reported changes in the percentage of students who were chronically absent. From 1996 to 1997, as schools developed school-family-community partnerships to help improve student attendance, the average rate of chronically absent students in the schools decreased from 8% to 6.1%. This change also indicates a potential connection between schools' efforts to implement family involvement activities and improvement in student attendance.

Several involvement practices had strong, positive associations with changes in average daily student attendance over 1 year, particularly assigning a truant officer to students and families with attendance problems ($r = .822$), rewarding students for improved attendance ($r = .624$), connecting parents with school contact persons ($r = .581$), referring chronically absent students to counselors ($r = .562$), communicating effectively with diverse families ($r = .541$), and conducting workshops for families focused on school attendance ($r = .533$).

A few specific activities that involve families and the community on issues of chronic absenteeism helped to reduce the percentage of students who missed 20 or more days of school. These activities were rewarding students for improved attendance ($r = -.478$), connecting parents with school contact persons ($r = -.623$), and making home visits ($r = -.648$).

On average, schools with after-school programs reported an increase in average daily student attendance (1.04%) from 1996 to 1997. In comparison, schools with no after-school programs reported a smaller average increase in attendance (0.3%). Also, schools with after-school programs reported a decrease in chronic absences (-4.2%), whereas schools with no after-school programs reported an increase in the percentage of students who were chronically absent (1.44%). On average, schools with after-school programs reported an increase in average daily student attendance (1.04%).

This study is important in that it illustrates that schools can influence student attendance at the elementary level and points to specific practices that are effective. However whether or not these results carry over into secondary school needs further research.

Parke, C. S., & Kanyongo, G. Y. (2012). Student attendance, mobility, and mathematics achievement in an urban school district. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 105(3),161-175.

While the above studies [Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002), Sheldon, S. B. (2007), Steward, R. J., Steward, A. D., Blair, J., Jo, H., & Hill, M. F. (2008) and Roby, Douglas E. (2004)] provide information on the relationship between attendance and achievement, no explanations were offered on the reason(s) for nonattendance. This study explores the relationship between student mobility, attendance and achievement by focusing on students as the unit of analysis. That is, data for all variables in the study were obtained at the student level, not at the aggregate school level. In addition suggestions are provided for the kinds of data that districts should collect in order to clarify the reasons for

nonattendance. The authors also provide references to districts that have successful practices, and provide references to other studies they have conducted that dive deeper into the data they collected.

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the levels of student mobility and non-attendance at Grades 1–12 in a large northeastern urban school district (80 schools) in ways that would be meaningful and useful to schools and the community. This allowed for comparisons within and across elementary, middle, and high schools. Attendance and mobility were examined by using the district's classification of students into one of four categories: stable attenders, stable non-attenders, mobile attenders, and mobile non-attenders.

Data is provided on the prevalence of mobility and nonattendance in Grades 1–12 across all students and by gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic subgroups and the impact on student mathematics achievement. Results show that nonattendance-mobility negatively impact mathematics achievement as measured by the state's assessment, even after controlling for socioeconomic status and gender. Importantly a differential impact across ethnicities was not found, but rather SES status was significant. In other words poverty is more of a factor in attendance and achievement than race. In addition data were collected on the nature of mobility (e.g. out of district/within district and reasons for moving).

Some Findings:

- The percentage of students who were mobile increased to a great degree over the grades, from 12% of Grade 1 students moving at least once during the school year to 52% in Grade 5.
- As the grade level increased, data showed a decline in attendance. At the high school level, only 54% of students, on average, from Grades 9 to 12, were classified as attenders.
- There was a lower percentage of stable attenders and a higher percentage of mobile non-attenders for the Black versus White subgroup.
- The attendance–mobility variable had a significant impact on achievement even after controlling for gender and SES.

The authors discuss the kinds of data that would be helpful for districts to collect and offer references that describe initiatives other districts have implemented that have proven helpful. They explain that finding out when, where, and why students move can help the district find ways to get students and families to stay in the school. When the extent of the problems and patterns are understood, then the district can discuss ways to improve the numbers.

They also encourage districts to learn from initiatives, programs and strategies in other districts. They provide references that describe what successful districts have done to improve attendance and achievement that mitigate against the detrimental effects of mobility and nonattendance, such as interruption of learning for all students, breaks in classroom routines and consequences for long range planning.

Lastly the authors recommend improvements in data collection on mobility and attendance:

- Create more specific operational definitions of mobility and attendance, capture the number of times students move, indicate the actual number of days students are absent.
- Examine cohorts of students (those that remain) and non-cohorts (those that return) in the school system from Grades 9 to 12, collecting their demographic characteristics and academic indicators.

This study would prove valuable to those who seek to create data collection methods that reveal the extent of the mobility or nonattendance problem so that grades and schools that are of most concern are identified. Also, the authors provide studies of districts that have developed effective school practices for school personnel who seek ideas that are proven to be effective.

Ready, D. (2010). Socioeconomic disadvantage, school attendance, and early cognitive development: The differential effects of school exposure. *Sociology of Education*, 83(4), 271-286.

There are many reasons found for absenteeism among low SES students. These are described as a result of family circumstances and lack of health care. This study attempts to examine the extent to which social class differences in literacy and mathematics learning are related to school attendance rates. It is reasoned that the benefits of formal schooling may be greater for socioeconomically disadvantaged children, and conversely the effect of school absences would have a disproportionately negative effect in their mathematics and literacy learning.

This study used longitudinal data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K). The author presents data that strongly link the effect of schooling on Low SES children in grades K-1. The effects of school attendance or absenteeism and of summer learning loss on literacy and mathematics test results are reported.

School attendance rates and social class were found to be statistically related. Tables are presented that show the relationship between, sociodemographic characteristics of K and first grade attendance, (n=13, 613 children in 903 schools), and social class, school attendance and early literacy development.

It was found that Low SES children who attend school regularly show a greater rate of growth in literacy assessments than High SES children. So much so that compared to High SES children with good attendance, Low SES children with good attendance gain almost 8% more literacy skills per month during K and almost 7% more per month during first grade. However, even with this rate the gap between SES groups although narrowed, remains.

Put another way, the initial difference in literacy skills between low and high SES children with good attendance narrows by roughly one-third by the end of first grade. Conversely, the gap between low SES children with poor attendance and their more affluent peers with good attendance narrows by less than 8 percent during the first two years of formal schooling

Results in mathematics were not comparable with findings in literacy, explained in part because of the differences in the amount of instructional time dedicated to mathematics. In theory, mathematics development should become more closely tied to school attendance as curricula and classroom instruction focus more strongly on mathematics.

School year gains in learning for Low SES students were found to decrease more over the summer than their High SES counterparts.

From a sociological perspective the author asserts that services should be provided for children with cognitive, health and psychological needs so that they are able to attend school. These services would include quality and availability of day care, medical services and community outreach programs.

Roby, Douglas E. (2004). Research on School Attendance and Student Achievement: A Study of Ohio Schools. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 28, (1), 1-15.

The objective of this study was to explore the relationship of student attendance and student achievement. The results of the Ohio Proficiency Tests taken by students in grades four, six, nine, and twelve were compared with their attendance averages to see if a positive correlation existed between school attendance and student achievement in those grade levels. It was found that more frequent school attendance was synonymous with higher proficiency test averages.

This study suggests a statistically significant relationship between student attendance and student achievement in Ohio at the fourth, sixth, ninth, and twelfth grade levels. The correlation of student attendance and student achievement is moderate to strong, with the most significant relationship occurring at the ninth grade level, when comparing attendance and achievement rates.

This statistical study indicates a relationship between student achievement and attendance. Further research is needed to explore whether or not there is a causal relationship, and if so what it is, reasons for truancy and patterns of attendance or non-attendance, (see Parke & Kanyongo [2012], below on student mobility) and given the above what interventions are effective. Continued studies are needed to provide additional information that may lead to strategies for improving student attendance and academic achievement.

Sheldon, S. B. (2007). Improving student attendance with school, family, and community partnerships. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 100(5), 267-275.

Both the Epstein (2002) study and this study involve schools that participated in the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University. However this study adopts a more rigorous design by using matched pair methodology. While the Epstein study showed that NNPS practices improved student attendance over time, this study compares Ohio NNPS schools attendance results over a one-year period with matched non-NNPS Ohio schools. Analyses showed that NNPS schools improved student attendance an average of .5%, whereas in comparison schools, rates of student attendance declined slightly from 1 year to the next.

This article describes in detail the NNPS approach to school-community family partnerships which is based on Epstein's (2001) framework² of six types of involvement to create comprehensive school, family, and community partnerships linked to specific school-improvement goals.

NNPS schools are trained to conduct partnership activities for these types of involvement: (1) parenting, e.g., providing help for all families to establish supportive home environments for children; (2) communicating, e.g., establishing two-way exchanges about school programs and children's progress; (3) volunteering, e.g., recruiting and organizing parent help at school, home, or other locations; (4) learning at home, e.g., providing information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and other curriculum-related materials; (5) decision making, e.g. having family members serve as representatives and leaders on school committees; and (6) collaborating with the community, e.g., identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs.

After controlling for all covariates between the matched pairs, NNPS schools during the 2001 school year had significantly greater increases in student attendance than did non-NNPS schools.

The authors note the limitations of this study in that it does not provide information on the partnership activities of the non-NNPS schools they conducted to address attendance issues, and how these may differ from or were similar to NNPS schools. In addition other factors such as high-quality teaching, positive student-teacher relationships, and a safe and engaging, school climate were not studied in terms of how they affect student attendance.

Researchers also need to explore questions about the effect of school-wide partnership programs with data from middle and high schools to determine the extent to which home-school connections carry over to effect adolescent attendance.

² Epstein J. L. (2001). *School and family partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Steward, R. J., Steward, A. D., Blair, J., Jo, H., & Hill, M. F. (2008). School Attendance Revisited: A Study of Urban African American Students' Grade Point Averages and Coping Strategies. *Urban Education, 43*(5), 519-536.

The objective of this study was to examine the degree to which urban ninth grade African American students' grade point averages (GPA) and coping strategies predict attendance. Implications for educational reform, school counseling service delivery, and future research are discussed. Negative coping strategies were identified as using legal substances (food, alcohol, smoking, and caffeine) as a means of escape. Positive coping strategies related to efforts to stay emotionally connected with people and accessing social support systems.

The freshman students in this study attended a high school that was ranked as one of the highest crime sites in the country. The school, population of 1100, and surrounding community were predominantly African American and located in a high-risk district for poverty, unemployment and crime. At the beginning of the study the attrition rate for ninth grade students ranged from 55% to 65% over a 5-year period. The purpose of the researcher-school collaboration was to identify and examine practices by high school counselors and teachers that influenced attendance and assisted students toward academic success.

Participants (n = 100) completed the Adolescent Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences Scale (A-COPE; Patterson & McCubbin, 1983), a measure of coping strategies. Participants' absences and cumulative GPAs were identified through the school records at the end of the 9-month academic year. Pearson product correlations were performed to examine the relationships between each coping strategy and number of absences. A multiple regression analysis was performed to identify the degree to which the criterion variable (number of absences) was predicted by the independent variables, cumulative GPA and coping strategies (as indicated by subscale scores on the A-COPE).

Results indicated that non-attenders tended to have lower GPAs, reported using avoidance less often as a means of coping, and reported using social support more often. Conversely, those students who attend school most frequently tend to have higher GPAs, use avoidance more often as a means of coping, and use members of their social support less often than do those who have more absences.

The researchers caution that the causal relationship between GPA and attendance is impossible to distinguish within the scope of this study. The question is: are students who have higher GPAs better academically prepared, or do they have better GPAs because they attend school regularly and therefore have greater opportunity for exposure to course content? The researchers advocate for the importance of academic remediation throughout K-12 to mitigate factors that contribute to the ability to access course content.

In regards to the relationship between lower GPA and the use of social supports is a reflection of the characteristics of the students' social environment. If student groups are truant, then hanging out with them will lead to absenteeism, conversely avoiding the truant social group may lead to better student attendance.

This article raises some interesting notions of how the interpretation of behaviors in an urban school environment may prove counter intuitive and that it is important to counsel not only students who have low attendance but also those who do not. These students may have hidden stressors that in the long run may prove too much to bear without some support. The researchers also note that finding ways to influence social norms may prove beneficial.