Meeting the Challenge of Combating Chronic Absenteeism

Impact of the NYC Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Chronic Absenteeism and School Attendance and Its Implications for Other Cities

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About This Report

This report by the Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University School of Education, examines the efforts and impacts of the NYC Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism & School Engagement. This report details the efforts undertaken by the task force to combat chronic absenteeism in New York City between 2010 and 2013. It examines the extent and nature of chronic absenteeism in New York City in schools with above-average rates of chronic absenteeism which were the focus of the task force's efforts. It investigates the impact of entering and exiting chronic absenteeism on academic outcomes. Finally, it examines the impact of the task force's chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention programs on reducing chronic absenteeism and increasing school attendance – and what that means for other cities.

The report uses mixed methods methodology. Description of the task force's efforts is based on observation, interviews, and document review. Quantitative and statistical analysis is used to examine the extent of chronic absenteeism, its relationship to academic outcomes and the impacts of the task force's efforts. Because the report is aimed at a diverse audience of practitioners, policy makers, elected officials, and researchers, only statistically significant impacts are reported but they are described in non-technical manners. The statistical models and equations used to generate the results are available as a web-based appendix to the report at www.every1graduates.org. The data necessary for the analysis were supplied by the New York City Department of Education following its standard protocols for data-sharing with external researchers.

A Report on the New York City Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism, and School Engagement

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Executive Summary

Three years ago, following a report about the pervasiveness of chronic absenteeism in New York City schools, Mayor Michael Bloomberg undertook the nation's most ambitious effort to tackle this issue in New York City public schools. Acknowledging that chronic absenteeism is a complex, under-recognized problem affecting academic achievement, dropout rates and juvenile crime, the Mayor created an interagency task force to develop a comprehensive set of strategies to combat this problem. Those strategies were piloted in 25 schools in year one, 50 schools in year two, and in year three 100 schools, with over 60,000 students. **The key elements of those strategies are being rolled out to schools beyond the pilot during the 2013-14 school year, and are as follows:**

- **Citywide Interagency Effort:** The chronic absenteeism campaign was an interagency effort, spearheaded by the Mayor's office, in partnership with the Department of Education (DOE). This leadership from the Mayor helped provide a sense of urgency, convening power and the cross-sector support needed to drive change. This strategy was critical because the causes of chronic absenteeism are so complex and varied that no school district can tackle it alone: they include homelessness, asthma, housing mobility, familial responsibilities, fear of gangs, bullying, and parents or students who do not understand the importance of attendance, or of school. Key interagency partners included the Administration for Children's Services, the Department of Homeless Services, the Department of Health, the Department for the Aging, NYC Service, the Department of Youth and Community Development, the NYC Police Department, as well as private sector and community partners.

- **Data to Measure, Monitor, Act:** The task force used data to (1) identify over the summer the students chronically absent during the prior year to target at the beginning of each new school year; (2) develop "early warning" flags to identify for early intervention students at risk of chronic absenteeism; (3) monitor "targeted" students' progress and adjust interventions in real time; and (4) share student data with school partners, mentors, and key agencies through new data-sharing agreements.

- **"Success Mentors"—Personalized Support for Students & Families:** The task force created the NYC Success Mentor Corps, reaching nearly 10,000 at-risk students last year — the nation's largest school-based mentoring effort in a single city. There are three primary mentor models, which share core components but differ by the pool of mentors from which they were selected: (1) "external" mentors, staffed by existing or newly recruited non-profit school partners (e.g., AmeriCorps, social work students, retired professionals, etc.); (2) "internal" school mentors (teachers, coaches, security officers, etc.); and (3) "peer" mentors, staffed by selected 12th grade students.

- **Principal Leadership—Principals' Weekly Student Success Meeting:** The Task Force introduced weekly principal-led **"**student success meetings" to bring school partners together for data-driven, collaborative problem solving. Meetings routinely covered student-level and school-wide data review (i.e., school-wide patterns and trends and individual student warning signs or progress) and collaborative intervention planning and assessment. Participants include the school leadership team, representatives from the school's partner organizations, the Success Mentor team leader, and, when appropriate, local service providers to strengthen school access to these resources. This is a central component of the task force's school-based efforts, along with site visits, trainings, and materials committed to maximizing the impact of this meeting model.

- **New Models for Connecting Local Community Resources to Schools:** The task force developed simple "connect the dots" strategies to link schools to existing community resources (including city preventive service providers), including methods to identify these resources and connect them to students and families as needed to maximize resources.

- **Promoting Awareness About Chronic Absenteeism:** The task force developed prevention efforts targeting schools, parents, and students, including a city-wide Ad Council campaign on buses, subways and metro cards ("It's 9 AM, Do You Know Where Your Kids Are?"); and WakeUpNYC! through which 30,000 students received recorded wake-up calls from celebrities and student role models last year.

- **Incentives—Noticing Every Absence & Recognizing Success:** Strategies were developed to make it clear that student absences were noticed, and that student success and improvements were publicly recognized. Schools were urged to hold assemblies, give certificates, and use "perks" like tickets or special privileges to promote positive change. Schools were also urged to ensure that every absence got a rapid response, including a call home.

- **Accountability Strategies to Sustain Efforts:** Chronic absenteeism is now a metric being embedded in school progress reports and evaluations at DOE and in monthly homeless shelter reports. Data on absenteeism is available on DOE's website, is a "flagged" item in its data system, and is included in school leadership and shelter provider trainings and materials.

Details of these core elements are set forth in this report, and on the task force's web-based Tool Kit at www.NYC.Gov/EveryStudent.

This report evaluates the task force's three-year effort to reduce chronic absenteeism and increase attendance for at-risk students at high-need schools. The key research issues examined are: (1) the impact of the task force's efforts in reducing chronic absenteeism at its pilot schools over the past three years, both school-wide and for individual students; (2) the specific impacts of the Success Mentor component; (3) the impact of entering and exiting chronic absenteeism on academic outcomes, an open question until now; and (4) the scalability and sustainability of these efforts at the school level. In addition the report discusses the implications for other cities.

Key findings from the report include:

- Task force schools significantly and consistently outperformed comparison schools in reducing chronic absenteeism.
- In statistically significant ways, students in the task force schools were less likely to be chronically absent and more likely to be solid attenders than students in comparison schools.
- Students in poverty at task force schools were 15% less likely to be chronically absent than similar students at comparison schools.
- Students in temporary shelters who were in task force schools—a major focus of the task force efforts—were 31% less likely to be chronically absent than similar students at comparison schools.

- Success Mentors, and their supporting infrastructure, were the most effective component of the task force's effort across all school types. Previously chronically absent students who had mentors gained almost two additional weeks (9 days) of school per student, per year.
- In the 25% of schools with the greatest impacts, chronically absent students supported by Success Mentors gained, on average, more than a month of school.
- Previously chronically absent students in 2012-13 with Success Mentors gained 51,562 additional days of school compared to previously chronically absent students without mentors at comparison schools; and 92,277 additional days compared to comparison school students without mentors during the three-year initiative.
- Previously chronically absent high school students with Success Mentors were 52% more likely to remain in school the following year than equivalent comparison students who did not receive mentors, suggesting that this is a useful dropout prevention strategy.
- Students who stop being chronically absent see academic improvements — an open question until now: Students who exited chronic absenteeism in 2009-2010 were 20 percentage points more likely to remain in school three years later (80%) than students who became chronically absent that year (60%).
- Students who become chronically absent see declines in average GPA (from 72% to 67%, dropping from a C to a D) while those who exit chronic absenteeism see improvement (from 72% to 73%), a statistically significant difference given that these are cumulative GPAs which are harder to move. GPAs of students who continue to not be chronically absent continue to improve in the second year after exiting chronic absenteeism.
- Chronic absenteeism is typically the first off-track indicator to develop, before students exhibit disciplinary issues. For 86% of students suspended in sample schools in 2012-13, attendance issues were the first warning sign to develop.

These findings from the NYC effort demonstrate that effective, cost-efficient strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism, increase attendance, and improve academic outcomes in our nation's schools are achievable, even in our communities with the greatest needs. This is good news — which will hopefully encourage other cities, school districts and states to follow New York City's lead.

Introduction: Why Cities Should Care about Chronic Absenteeism

In our nation's cities chronic absenteeism is widespread but usually unacknowledged. Simply put, we do not measure it, so we do not notice it (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Only a handful of states and cities regularly report on chronic absenteeism rates and the attendance measure that is used—average daily attendance—masks more than it reveals. It is possible for a school to have a 90% attendance rate, while a quarter of its students are chronically absent, missing a month or more of school. This is problematic as chronic absenteeism is one of the ways poverty taxes a community's ability to provide a pathway through schooling to adult success. As a result, chronic absenteeism—missing 10%, or 20 days or more of school [1]—acts like bacteria in a hospital, an unseen force that creates havoc with the academic health of our students. An abundance of research has established that chronic absenteeism from pre-kindergarten forward lowers academic achievement, increases dropout rates, and weakens college and career readiness. **The extent of chronic absenteeism and its impacts, particularly in communities that educate large numbers of low-income students, are so great that educators and policymakers cannot truly understand achievement and graduation gaps or evaluate the effectiveness of efforts to close them without factoring in the role of chronic absenteeism.** This is because far too often the very students we are trying to help are not in school regularly enough to adequately receive the intervention being implemented and measured. Moreover, there is also clear evidence that, especially during early and mid-adolescence, chronically absent students are more likely to end up in the juvenile justice system.

Chronic absenteeism is a national problem, handicapping education efforts across the country. It is estimated that between 5 million and 7.5 million students nationwide are not attending school regularly (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). In New York City approximately 200,000 students—1 out of 5—were chronically absent last year, missing a month or more of school. The city also found that 79% of children in the juvenile justice system had records of chronic absenteeism just prior to their arrests, and in almost half of these cases, absenteeism was severe, with children missing 38 or more days of school (NYC Criminal Justice Coordinator's Office, 2010 data analysis). Additional analysis showed that students with good attendance were more than twice as likely to score "proficient" on academic achievement tests as students who missed a month or more of school (NYC Independent Budget Office, 2011).

The good news in this is that mayors, school districts, and communities have at their disposal a sure-fire and relatively low cost way to raise academic achievement, increase graduation rates, reduce juvenile justice costs, build better pathways out of poverty, and improve the overall health and economic vitality of their locales: that is, to work together to get their students to attend school every day.

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[1] Currently some districts and states, including New York City, define chronic absenteeism as missing 20 or more days of school, while others are defining chronic absenteeism as missing 10% of school. Both definitions can identify essentially the same students, depending on how they are applied and have different strengths and weaknesses. In this report, for analytic purposes we use the 10% definition as it enables us to capture a greater number of students, i.e. students who are enrolled for part of the school year and missed 10% or more of school when they were enrolled.

Overview of Findings

The report examines a three-year effort spearheaded by the NYC Mayor's Office in partnership with the NYC Department of Education ("DOE") and multiple city agencies and non-profit partners to comprehensively combat chronic absenteeism.

> *The positive impacts were consistent across elementary, middle, and high schools, and 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.*

There are three core findings from this report:

The first finding is that students who stop being chronically absent see academic improvements across the board, including in their high school credit accrual and promotion rates, as well as improved grades and achievement test performances, and are less likely to drop out. This lets us know that as dangerous as chronic absenteeism is for a student's school success and post-secondary opportunities, improvements in attendance can reverse or limit the damage. It also contradicts the far-too-often-held belief that "off-track" students cannot recover or improve academic performance.

The second finding is that cost-efficient, high-impact strategies exist to reduce chronic absenteeism. The NYC chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention programs had a statistically significant and educationally meaningful impact on chronic absenteeism levels at task force pilot schools and even greater improvements on the attendance rates of individually mentored students, using practical and cost-efficient methods that any school district can replicate. To achieve cost efficiencies, a core component of the task force's efforts was repurposing *existing* resources in more strategic, targeted ways.

Pilot schools that implemented the key components of the campaign's program saw improvements and a statistically significant reduction in their chronic absentee rates that outpaced any changes in similarly matched comparison schools over time. Individual students within those pilot schools were similarly less likely to become chronically absent, and students who participated in the task force's NYC Success Mentor Corps program had significantly improved attendance rates. **The positive impacts were consistent across elementary, middle, and high schools, and 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.**

The third finding is that the Interagency Task Force was able to expand and institutionalize its efforts. By taking a comprehensive, multi-agency, public-private partnership approach to tackling the problem, the task force was able to significantly impact rates of absenteeism at its target schools, create an infrastructure to expand upon its success citywide, and transform the school system's and city agencies' understanding of the impact of chronic absenteeism on school achievement and student success. One telling example is that chronic absenteeism rates, which were unknown in most schools and to most principals and parents when the task force began its work, are now embedded in the school district's accountability metrics and are publicly reported for each school. In addition, data, trainings, and strategies to enable schools to address chronic absenteeism have been built into the school district's network support structure. These efforts required only a modest financial investment and thus further showed that through artful re-organization and coordination of existing assets and functions, large impacts are possible.

Specific impact findings are:

- Task force schools significantly and consistently outperformed comparison schools in reducing chronic absenteeism.
- The greatest impacts on chronic absenteeism were achieved for two key target groups of the initiative: high-poverty minority students who were 15% less likely to be chronically absent and students in temporary shelters who were 31% less likely to be chronically absent.
- Over three years the task force was able to expand its chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention program to 100 schools enrolling more than 62,815 students (larger than the Boston, DC, or Sacramento school districts) and obtain effective implementation levels in the vast majority of them.
- School-wide efforts in pilot schools not only reduced the number of chronically absent students, but also increased the number of students with better attendance, i.e. missing 5% or less of school.
- Success Mentors and their supporting infrastructure were the most effective component of the task force's chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention effort. Students with histories of chronic absenteeism who were assigned a Success Mentor, on average, gained almost two additional weeks of schooling—a threshold linked with positive impacts on academic outcomes and dropout prevention.
- In the 25% of schools with the greatest impacts, chronically absent students supported by Success Mentors gained, on average, more than a month of school.
- In total, mentored students who had previously been chronically absent gained 51,562 days of additional schooling in 2012-13 and 92,277 days during the three years of the initiative.

- High school students who had a Success Mentor were 52% more likely to remain in school the following year than were equivalent comparison students without Success Mentors. This suggests that combating chronic absenteeism in high school with Success Mentors is also a powerful dropout prevention strategy.

The pathway from poverty to adult success runs through our schools. What the New York City efforts to combat chronic absenteeism reveal is that for this pathway to work, students need to be in school every day, and cities have the capacity to organize themselves to help students and families overcome the barriers that prevent this. **As a result, the NYC mayor's task force to combat chronic absenteeism, along with emerging efforts in a few other sites (such as Baltimore and Oakland), demonstrate that we have a powerful untapped tool at our disposal to close achievement gaps, increase graduation rates, improve college and career readiness, and decrease crime and social welfare costs—that is, organizing and applying ourselves to get our students to school every day without fail.**

In this regard, one of the most lasting national benefits of the NYC campaign is the extensive effort that has been undertaken to document the task force's work. The task force has assembled and made available on a public website (www.nyc.gov/EveryStudent) a comprehensive set of tools, how-tos, guidebooks, lessons learned, and videos that other cities can use as a roadmap. Given the scale of the efforts in NYC (25 schools participated in year 1 of the efforts, 50 in year 2, and 100 in year 3), and the size of the NYC school system (well over a million students enrolled, equal to the state of North Carolina), the NYC efforts, strategies, and tools can also inform not only mayors and school district leaders, but also state-wide programs led by governors to combat chronic absenteeism.

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Part 1: Dimensions and Key Elements of the Task Force Effort to Combat Chronic Absenteeism

Informed by a report from The New School (Strengthening School by Strengthening Families, 2008) that documented for the first time the extent of chronic absenteeism in New York City's schools and its pervasiveness in a subset of schools, Mayor Bloomberg organized an interagency task force, led by his office in partnership with the Department of Education, to develop and implement a citywide effort to reduce chronic absenteeism. In early 2010, the task force undertook an intensive due diligence, planning, and organizational period, and launched the effort in 25 pilot schools during the 2010-11 school year. By the 2012-13 school year, the third full year of the campaign, 100 schools with more than 60,000 students were participating. In so doing it became the largest, most comprehensive effort ever undertaken in our country to combat chronic absenteeism. For evaluation purposes, 46 other NYC schools that had similar ranges of chronically absent, free/reduced lunch program eligible, and limited-English-proficiency students were used for comparison.

Many of the core components of the task force's efforts were established during the planning period, while others emerged during the program's implementation as the task force engaged in a continuous process of evaluation, learning, and refinement of its efforts. The most central elements of the effort, detailed through interviews with key participants as well as a review of the effort's published materials, follow. It is important to note that these efforts are interconnected and together achieved the results reported herein. A more detailed description of the efforts can be found in the Appendix II.

A Multi-Pronged Interagency Effort Led by the Mayor's Office

The chronic absenteeism campaign was an interagency effort, spearheaded by the mayor—a structure that created a shared sense of urgency around this issue, convening power and the broad, multi-sector support needed to drive change. A message that was repeated throughout our evaluation was the critical importance of the mayor's leadership in driving change, and in getting public and private sector support and attention. The reasons behind chronic absenteeism are varied and complex, ranging from external factors like homelessness, family dysfunction, and transportation, to students' internal factors, such as health, fear of bullying, concern for safety, and simply not seeing the point of attending school daily. Therefore, having a comprehensive strategy that incorporates "the village" of city agencies, public-private partnerships, and community partners is critical. No school system can tackle this problem alone. In New York City the effort included all relevant city agencies that intersect with youth and families, including the Department of Education, Child Welfare Homeless Services, Youth Development, the Police Department, the Housing Authority, the Department of Health, the Department for the Aging, the District Attorney, and NYC Service.

To ensure that the collaboration between the school system and the mayor's office was strong, the entire task force team, including representatives from the mayor's office, the school system, and technical assistance providers, met biweekly to assess new data and operations, make course corrections or expand best practices in real time, and along with other agency partners, stayed in constant communication in developing and assessing programs and policies.

Technical assistance and training to help schools implement task force tools, technologies, and processes were also a vital part of the implementation efforts. School-focused technical assistance allowed the task force to identify and explore disconnects in the field in real time and enabled schools to feel like they were being supported and heard. A technical assistance team from the Children's Aid Society conducted site visits to new pilot schools within the first 12 weeks of school to ensure that they were off to a strong start; the team followed up as needed or requested by the school. All the principals in pilot schools were brought together twice a year for a Principals' Leadership Summit (initially at the mayor's official home, and later elsewhere when the group became too large), for training, program development, data review, and morale building. Additional retreats were held with other key partners and stakeholders to explain the initiative, drill down on relevant operational details, and keep enthusiasm strong.

Data: Measure, Monitor, Act

The task force soon learned that clear, simple data about chronic absenteeism was often hard to obtain, even within a school, and was not fully used as a prevention or intervention tool. Thus, a central mission of the task force has been to train and encourage schools and their partners to use specific student and school-wide attendance data as critical organizing and management tools: to identify chronically absent students and those at risk of becoming so, as well as patterns and trends, in order to develop preventive strategies and track outcomes in real time to assess what works and what doesn't. This stands in marked contrast to the typical focus in schools on average daily attendance, often viewed as a compliance-driven metric that seldom generates much inquiry or reflection. Thus, the first critical steps in the task force's efforts were to standardize access to timely, user-friendly data on chronic absenteeism by schools and key partners and create an infrastructure and culture that put measuring, monitoring, and acting upon chronic absenteeism data at the center of everyone's efforts.

Creating data-sharing and confidentially agreements between schools and partner agencies or community-based organizations working with students was another core component of the task force's work. It cannot be overstated how important this data-sharing component of the NYC effort was to its success. It enabled schools and students to get better support from non-profit partners and community-based organizations. Providing mentors and other school-based partners with direct access to carefully selected "ABC" data (attendance, behavior and coursework) for the students with whom they work allowed them to be continually informed, and hence more effective in driving student achievement. It meant that their need for actionable data did not become an additional burden on school personnel, nor did Success Mentors lose access to data if school personnel were not available to provide it.

Principals' Buy-In and Leadership

Based on its review of the causes of chronic absenteeism and existing effective practices to combat it, the task force soon concluded that the intervention work at the center of the effort had to be focused in the schools with high levels of chronic absenteeism, and would center around direct outreach to, and problem-solving with, chronically absent students and their families. For this to be effective and become institutionalized, the task force also concluded that principals had to be at the center of efforts to combat chronic absenteeism. For a school to be eligible as a task force pilot school, the principal had to agree to personally lead a weekly student success meeting of key stakeholders at the school, including a representative from each school-linked community-based partner, school leadership (guidance counselor, parent coordinator, etc.), and the Success Mentors' team leader (and possibly others, at the principal's discretion). The purpose of the meeting was to collaboratively review aggregate data, early warning lists, and selected student data to identify patterns of chronic absenteeism, and collaboratively act upon them. This meeting also served to bring school partners together, many of whom had worked in the same school for years and never met. This weekly meeting was a driving component of the task force's school-based efforts, and the principal trainings and technical assistance visits addressed how to make this action-oriented meeting effective.

One veteran principal expressed a common reaction that she was initially annoyed that she had to hold yet another weekly meeting, but then ended up making it a core part of her school improvement strategy, noting: "It brought my school together for my students; it taught us how to look at data collaboratively [and] how to rethink attendance and chronic absenteeism; and it reminded me how many resources I actually had in my building that I wasn't fully using."

NYC Success Mentor Corps

The task force also quickly realized that additional person power would need to be mobilized to enable person-to-person outreach to chronically absent students and their families: to stress the importance of regular school attendance, to welcome students to school regularly, and to address the issues and barriers preventing regular school attendance. The task force further realized that to be both scalable and sustainable the person power would need to be found by re-organizing existing school personnel and adapting the work of existing external non-profit partners. To address these needs, the task force piloted and continually refined The NYC Success Mentor Corps, a research-based, data-driven model using "early warning" technology tools and data-sharing agreements. There were three Success Mentor models, which shared core components but differed by the pool of mentors they were selected from: (1) the external model staffed by non-profit partners (e.g., City Year, social work students, retired professionals); (2) the internal model staffed by school personnel (teachers, coaches, security officers, etc.), and (3) peer models, staffed by 12th-grade students. In three years, the NYC Success Mentor Corps became the largest, most comprehensive in-school mentoring effort in the nation within a single city, reaching almost 10,000 chronically absent, or at-risk-of-becoming-chronically-absent, students.

Success Mentors are assigned to their mentees early in the school year, are required to work the full school year, and mentors from community based agencies must be at school a minimum of 3 days/15 hours per week. Twenty percent of their time is focused on whole-school attendance and culture efforts; the rest is spent working with their mentees. Success Mentors begin the day greeting their mentees and expressing enthusiasm to see them in school, or calling homes as soon as possible if the mentees are not in school, with a positive statement about how much they are missed. They meet one-on-one and in groups, and are expected from week 1 to identify students' strengths and celebrate them. They are also asked to identify the underlying causes of absenteeism, work with the student to solve those issues within their capacity (i.e., helping them find a more reliable bus route to school, convincing them of the importance of daily school attendance, helping them complete their schoolwork so they don't avoid school when it's not done), and where necessary work with the school partners to connect the student and family to local supports to address more significant underlying problems.

Schools as Organizing Hubs for Community and Social Service Supports

The task force recognized that schools, students and families often were not aware of the availability of social service supports from city agencies and how to access them. In addition, city social service agencies did not always have access to data on the attendance of students under their care or with whom they regularly interacted. As a result, concerted efforts were made to strengthen the ability of task force schools to serve as organizing hubs where community and agency social services could connect with students and families. The task force created simple systems to connect schools to community resource networks in their areas, and to help "connect the dots" in bringing them together.

One of the deepest interagency collaborations within the task force occurred between the Department of Education and the Department of Homeless Services. They partnered with 15 family shelters, providing shelter staff with access to student and school data. This contributed to a doubling of shelter placements within school districts, enabling students to remain at their school of origin. Shelter staff were provided first-ever access to student attendance data so attendance could be monitored and improved, and trainings on how to improve attendance. Attendance rates were added to the monthly shelter performance and year-end progress reports; Student Success Summits for families were held at the shelters; and homework centers were created at the pilot shelters. As a high level official at the Department of Homeless Services said, "This effort has transformed the culture at our shelters by making school attendance and performance a priority… Having access to school data for students at our shelters, working directly with DOE through the task force, and knowing that school attendance is a measured metric, have made all shelter directors focus more on ensuring that our students go to school every day and reach their potential. It seems like common sense, but until now we just didn't have the tools, data, or knowledge to do it."

Incentives: Noticing Every Absence, and Celebrating Successes

A familiar theme among chronically absent students (and to an extent, their parents) was that no one "noticed" or "cared" if they showed up. The task force developed a series of strategies to counter that perception. Participating schools were encouraged, and received tools and supports, to recognize good and improved attendance regularly, and to send a consistent message: that it was important for students to be in school every day, that absences were noticed, and that students were welcomed and wanted in school every day. In addition, the goal was to move the school to a point where every student absence got a rapid response, including a call home. Moreover, schools were urged to hold assemblies, give certificates, or publicly recognize students with improved outcomes; thousands of "Good News" postcards were also distributed for school staff, community-based organizations, and mentors to send home to celebrate small successes, as well as award templates signed by the mayor and schools chancellor. Schools also received free tickets and perks from corporate partners such as the NY Yankees, Starbucks, and Macy's to be strategically used as incentives to promote success, as well as lists of free incentives that could be used. Principal and mentor surveys, as well as discussions at summits and trainings, established that school leaders and mentors alike thought that these incentives were an effective tool in encouraging positive behavior.

Getting the Message Out: Promoting Awareness about Chronic Absenteeism

The task force's outreach and due diligence confirmed that knowledge about the dangers of chronic absenteeism was limited among educators, students, and parents alike; few benchmarks existed for parents or educators to know when students were at risk of being chronically absent. Focus groups showed that far too often educators, parents, and students had little knowledge as to what constituted a dangerous level of days missed. To heighten awareness about the definition and costs of chronic absenteeism, the task force launched two awareness campaigns:

- The Ad Council "It's 9 AM, Do You Know Where Your Children Are?" campaign warned parents, "If your kids have missed 20 or more days of school, there's a good chance they won't graduate." The campaign also included the city's first electronic Truancy & Absenteeism Help Center, where parents can text a number or call 311 to find out how to "get help." Through the center, parents can find out how many days of school their child has missed and find free resources in the community for support. Ads were displayed at bus and subway stations/kiosks and on 5 million NYC metro cards; posters were distributed to schools, community-based organizations (CBOs), and small businesses in targeted areas. There have been several thousand separate user visits to the help center.

- WakeUp! NYC is a multi-media celebrity wake-up call campaign with inspirational morning messages from celebrities such as Magic Johnson, the NY Yankees, John Legend and Whoopi Goldberg. More than 30,000 students signed up to get a morning call. In a telephone survey of randomly selected users last year, approximately 80% of parents surveyed said that the WakeUp calls helped them get their kids to school on time more frequently and/or more often.

In addition, much has been done to educate principals about the basic facts around chronic absenteeism, through principal summits, special materials, site visits, and inclusion of this issue in their regular principal trainings and website communications. Much of this effort was developed in response to the discovery that even among seasoned principals there was an assumption that attendance is largely about compliance, rather than improving performance outcomes, and that many were unaware of the level of chronic absenteeism at their schools; it was not a performance metric, nor did they have ready access to data about the level of chronic absenteeism. This obstacle has now been addressed with new data tools and absenteeism flags, and the inclusion of chronic absenteeism data in school accountability progress reports.

Other task force initiatives include:

- An Asthma-Friendly Schools Campaign to address the large number of elementary school students who miss school frequently because of this condition
- Homework centers established in all city family shelters to help create a culture of school attendance and success
- Creating an electronic "attendance help center" feature on DOE's website for parental access to their student's attendance data

- An NYC Interagency Engagement Center created with the NYPD, district attorney, probation, DOE and other community partners to help engage chronically absent students referred from probation, schools, and parents or picked up by the NYPD on truancy
- New accountability measures at DOE, where chronic absenteeism will be a metric on the progress report, and chronic absenteeism rates will be available by school on the public website.

Other cities have begun to borrow from the NYC model, and to that end, the task force created a web-based Tool Kit that can be found at www.nyc.gov/EveryStudent

Many cities are using this as the basis of their efforts to tackle this issue.

Part 2: Magnitude, Intensity, and Academic/Behavioral Correlates of Chronic Absenteeism in Task Force and Comparison Schools

The task force concentrated its efforts on schools with above-average rates of chronic absenteeism in New York City. For this reason, the 100 schools that participated in the effort and the 46 comparison schools provide a vantage point into the magnitude and intensity of chronic absenteeism and its association with academic and behavioral outcomes in schools with significant chronic absenteeism challenges.

The schools examined educate minority students who live in or near poverty, and vary by school effectiveness ratings.

The schools in the sample analyzed were evenly split among elementary (31%), middle (31%), and high schools (28%), with the final 10% being transfer schools[2]—alternative high schools designed for overage and under-credited high school students. Collectively, the 146 task force and comparison schools enrolled 87,685 students in 2012-13.

Following national trends, rates of chronic absenteeism in NYC are highest in high-poverty schools, and in NYC high-poverty schools also enroll a high percentage of minority students.

The pilot and comparison schools are almost entirely attended by African American and Latino students.

- 84% of the students, on average, in the pilot and comparison schools were eligible for free and reduced price lunch (a proxy for poverty/low-income status).
- 96% of the students, on average, were minority students

These are both considerably higher than citywide averages which are:

- 72% of students citywide were free/reduced price lunch eligible and
- 69% citywide were minority students (NYC Independent Budget Office, 2011).

With regard to school effectiveness—as measured by the NYC Department of Education's accountability system, which includes measures of both student academic outcomes and school climate—the task force schools and the comparison schools were highly diverse. For the 2011-12 school year, 17% of the schools received an A on their School Progress Reports, 26% received a B, 37% a C and 20% a D or F. There are about as many schools in the sample that by all other effectiveness measures are doing well, but still have large numbers of chronically absent students, as there are schools with high rates of chronic absenteeism that are struggling at almost every level.

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[2] Transfer Schools are smaller full-time high schools designed to re-engage students who have dropped out or at serious risk of dropping out.

The task force and comparison schools face a daunting attendance challenge.

Across the task force and comparison schools, large numbers and proportions of students are not attending school regularly. Table 1 below shows the percentage of students at task force and comparison schools who were chronically and severely chronically absent[3] by school level. The table also demonstrates that in comparison to all NYC schools, these schools had higher than average attendance challenges.

**Table 1 – 2011-12 Chronic Absence Rates for Task Force & Comparison Schools, and NYC**

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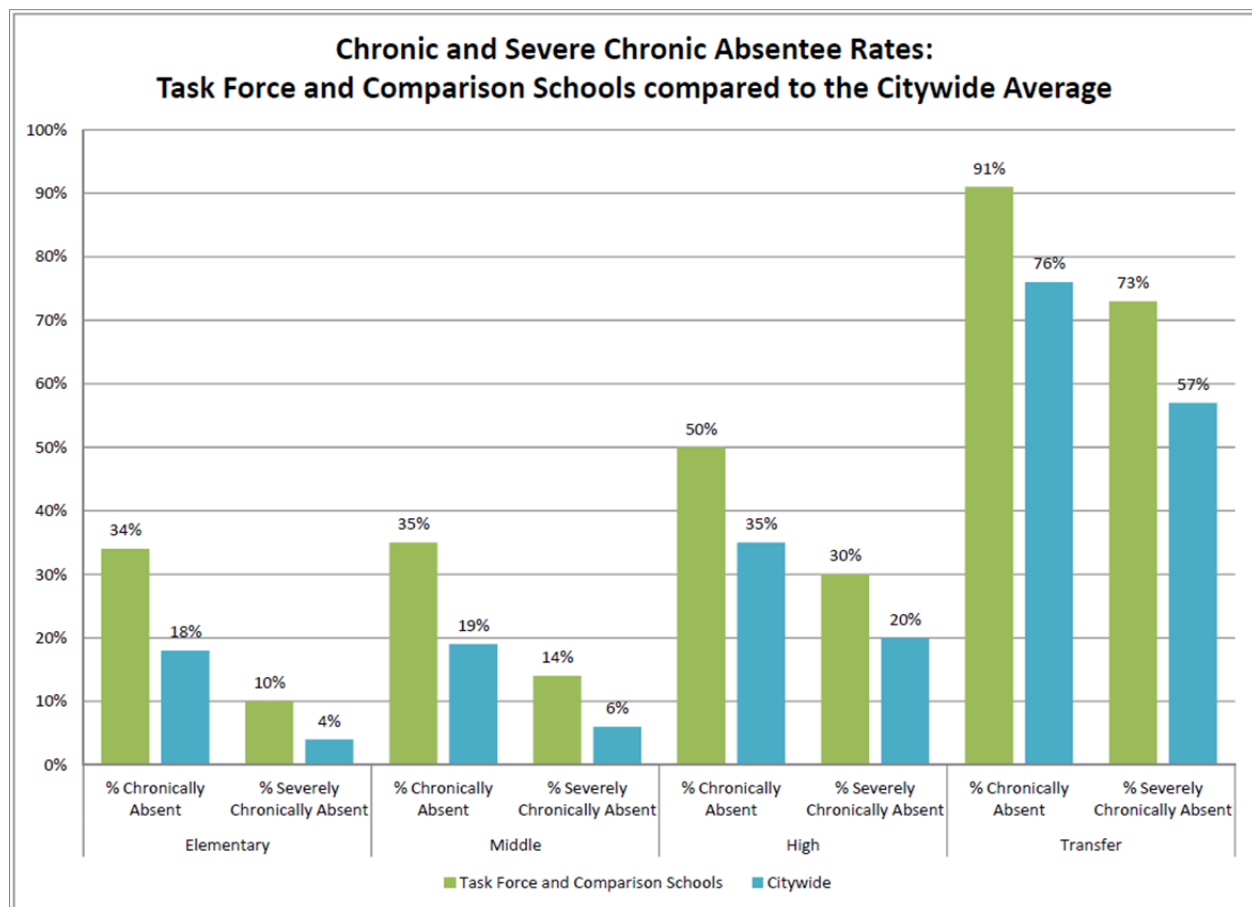
[3] Students are severely chronically absent if either they miss 20% or more of school or about 36 days or in districts which use total days missed to define severely chronically absent, 40 day of school.

The task force and comparison schools had more chronically absent students than solid attenders in most grade levels.

Chart 1 below shows that rates of chronic absenteeism and solid attendance (students who attend at or above 95% of the time) across the different grade levels for the task force and comparison schools in 2012-13. Chronic absenteeism rates are initially very high among students in pre-K (49%) to first grade (38%), and then gradually decline through the later elementary grades, reaching their low point in fifth grade, although one in four students is still chronically absent. Chronic absenteeism rates then begin to increase again through the middle grades and jump substantially in high school, to the point where half or more of the students enrolled in grades 9 to 12 are chronically absent. This pattern has been observed in other cities and states (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). What sheds new insight is the pattern for students with solid attendance (95% or above). At no grade level are more than half of the students solid attenders; from pre-k to first grade and ninth to 12th grades, only a quarter to a third of students are solid attenders in the sample schools.

When we examine the trends for chronic absenteeism and solid attendance together, we see that only from the third to seventh grades does the number of solid attenders exceed the number of chronically absent students. The greatest difference is achieved in the fifth grade with 45% solid attenders vs. 28% chronically absent students. **What is sobering is that even in this very best year—fifth grade—fewer than half the students are solid attenders and more than one-quarter are chronically absent. In the worst years (pre-K and high school), being chronically absent is the norm, with chronically absent students outnumbering solid attenders by 2 to 1 in schools with high rates of absenteeism.**

Figure 1 - Attendance Status by Grade Level
Task Force & Comparison Schools, 2012-13
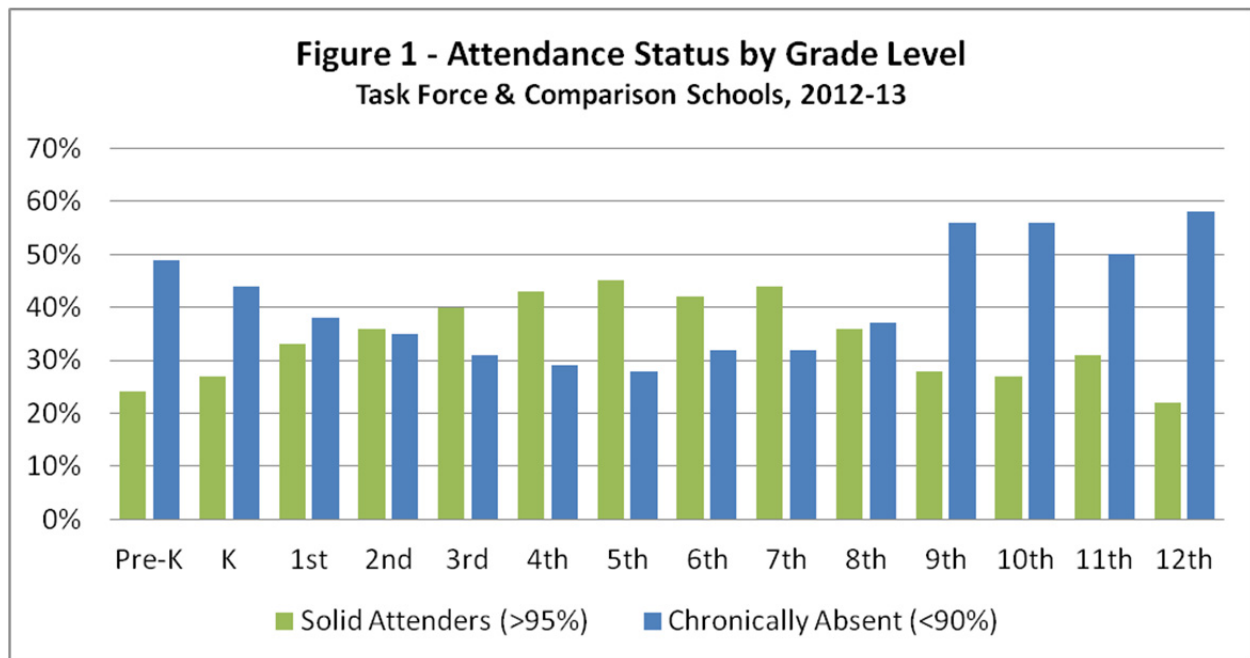
The task force and comparison schools show that in schools with above average rates of chronic absenteeism, more than 4 in 10 African American, Latino, and high-poverty students are chronically absent.

In the sample schools, 44% of African American, 47% of Latino, and 44% of high-poverty/low-income students (free and reduced-price lunch eligible) are chronically absent and only about a third are solid attenders. Latinos have both the highest rate of chronic absenteeism and the lowest rate of solid attenders. [4]

Figure 2 - Attendance Status by Demographic Group
Task Force & Comparison Schools, 2012-13
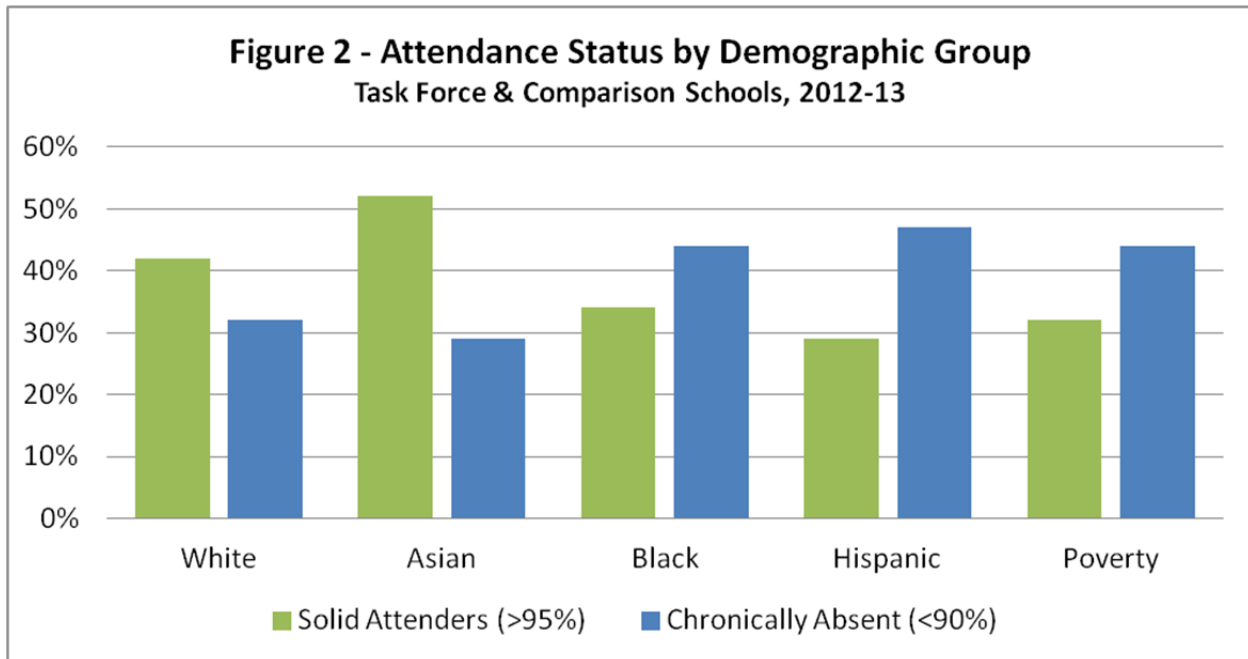
Special education, temporary shelter, and overage students have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism.

Within the sample schools, the students with the greatest rates of chronic absenteeism are special education students, students living in temporary shelters, and overage students. Across all grade levels, at least half of the special education students and those living in temporary shelters are chronically absent, and only a quarter are solid attenders. It is students who are overage for grade, however, who have the worst attendance, with more than two-thirds (69%) being chronically absent and only 16% solid attenders.

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[4] Citywide (30% for African American students, 29% for Latino students, and 26% for high-poverty/low-income students are chronically absent).

Figure 3 - Attendance Status by Background
Task Force & Comparison Schools, 2012-13
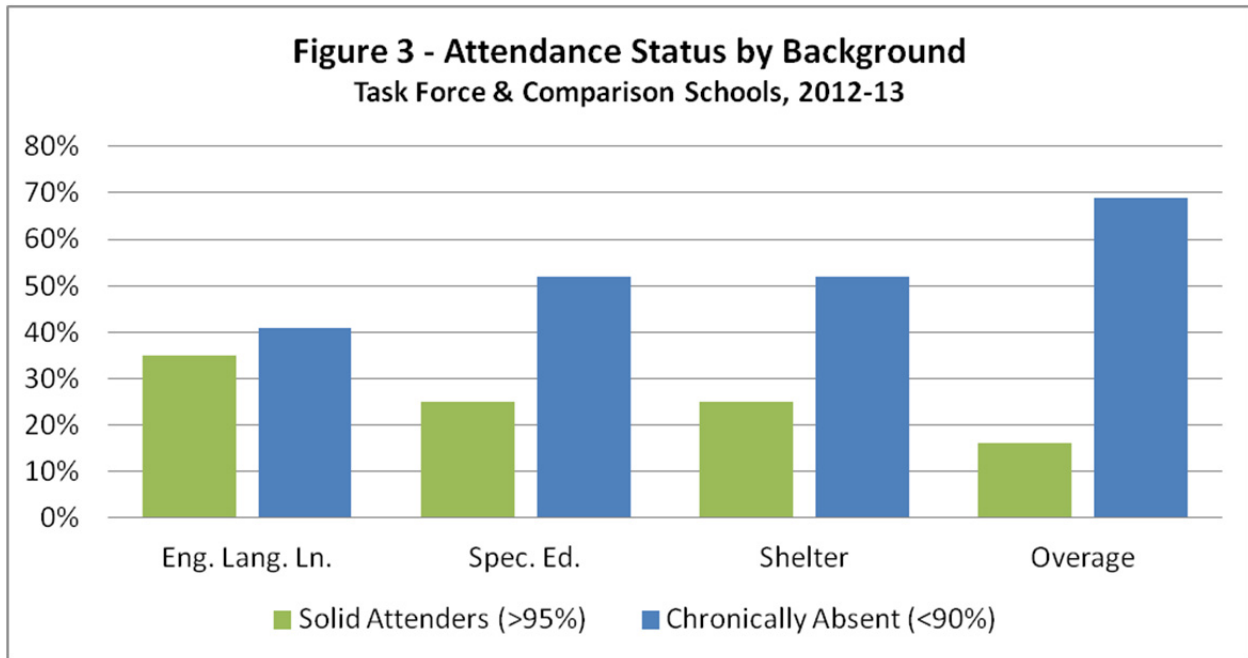
Three-fourths of the chronically absent students in 2012-13 in task force and comparison schools were also chronically absent in prior years.

Most of the students who are chronically absent in schools with above-average rates of chronic absenteeism in NYC, are so for multiple years. **Table 2 shows that most students chronically absent in 2012-13 had a previous experience of chronic absenteeism**. For those students with data going back three years (to the 2009-10 school year), more than half were chronically absent as early as three years prior, while three-quarters had been chronically absent in at least one of the past three years.

Most troubling, 40% of the chronically absent students in the examined schools had been chronically absent in each of the four years from 2009-10 to 2012-13. *For these 11,640 students who had been categorized as chronically absent for four years running, the average number of days absent over that span was 194, equivalent to more than an entire year of school missed per student.*[5]

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[5] Long-term chronically absent students shared similar demographic profiles with all chronically absent students in 2012-13. Because we could only examine students with complete data, it may be assumed that this is a conservative estimate of the percent of chronically absent students with a history of chronic absenteeism.

Table 2 – 2012-13 Chronically Absent Students' History with Chronic Absenteeism

	% Who were also Chronically Absent in 2011-12	% Who were also Chronically Absent in 2010-11	% Who were also Chronically Absent in 2009-10	% Who were also Chronically Absent in at least one of past three years
Students who were Chronically Absent in 2012-13	70%	65%	57%	73%

Table 3 below further highlights the extent to which chronic absenteeism is a multi-year occurrence, by looking at the chronic absenteeism history of students who are chronically absent in the sixth and ninth grades. These are two key transition years when overall rates of chronic absenteeism increase. The data show that while about 1 in 4 of chronically absent sixth-graders and 1 in 5 of chronically absent ninth-graders did not experience chronic absenteeism in the past three years, and may have been thrown off course by the transition to middle school or high school, most had histories of chronic absenteeism reaching into elementary school for sixth-graders, and middle school for ninth-graders. Roughly three-quarters had been chronically absent in at least one of the three prior years, and around one-third had been chronically absent in all of the three prior years. It is clear that in NYC schools with higher than average rates of chronic absenteeism, missing school is seldom a one time or self-correcting event. Absent effective intervention, chronic absenteeism does not typically abate on its own.

Table 3 – History of Chronic Absenteeism for 6th and 9th grade students who were chronically absent (CA) in 2012-13

	Never CA in three prior years	CA in one of three prior years	CA in two of three prior years	CA in all three prior years
6th graders	27%	19%	23%	31%
9th graders	18%	17%	23%	43%

Chronically absent students had substantially lower academic outcomes on key "College Readiness" indicators than solid attenders.

One of the most academically debilitating impacts of chronic absenteeism is that students often miss one day one week, and two days the next, and so on. As a result, they miss out on the coherent classroom instruction that is essential for learning. In short, whenever one day's lessons build off the prior lesson, chronically absent students are in trouble. Chronic absenteeism also undermines instruction that by nature or design needs to be cumulative over time, where one component of a skill builds sequentially on the mastery of another. This is likely why, after the early grades when learning to read is heavily skill-based, the largest negative relationship is typically found between chronic absenteeism and mathematics performance.

These impacts are clearly seen in the task force and comparison schools, **where chronically absent students were two times as likely as solid attenders to fail the Regents tests in math and English, and had substantially lower GPAs—both key indicators for college readiness and post-secondary enrollment** (Roderick et al., 2011 and Allensworth, 2013). The GPA for solid attenders was 80, compared to 65 for chronically absent students. This means that, on average, solid attenders have a B- average, close to the B or better average associated with success in college, whereas chronically absent students have GPAs that put them at substantial risk for dropping out.

Chronic absenteeism typically precedes disciplinary actions in task force and comparison schools, and chronically absent students have higher rates of disciplinary incidents than solid attenders.

For 86% of those students who were suspended in sample schools in 2012-13, attendance issues were the first warning sign to develop. Only 5% of those who were chronically absent in 2012-13 had been suspended prior to becoming chronically absent, while the remaining 9% first became chronically absent and were suspended in the same year. Conversely, of the students suspended in 2012-13, only 32% first exhibited a disciplinary warning sign (a prior suspension), while 44% first experienced chronic absenteeism prior to being suspended. (For 24% of students who were suspended in 2012-13, attendance and disciplinary indicators developed at the same time). **Thus, for our sample of students from the 146 task force and comparison schools in NYC, chronic absenteeism is predominantly the first off-track indicator to develop,** *before* **students exhibit disciplinary issues.**

> *For 86% of suspended students in the sample schools, chronic absenteeism was the first off-track indicator to develop, before students exhibit disciplinary issues — suggesting new "early warning" opportunities for preventing disciplinary and "off-track" behavior.*

Because chronic absenteeism typically preceded disciplinary issues in the sample schools, chronic absenteeism is typically a multi-year phenomenon, and many more students were chronically absent than received disciplinary sanctions, it is not surprising, as seen in figure 4 below, that the majority of students who received disciplinary sanctions in 2012-13 across the task force and comparison schools were also chronically absent. **It is still informative, however, as it suggests that efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism may also help reduce disciplinary incidents in schools.** This is supported by the fact that in the pilot and comparison schools, solid attenders made up a smaller percentage of students receiving a disciplinary sanction than they did of the overall school population. The reverse was true for chronically absent students. It also suggests that efforts to reduce disciplinary incidents in schools need to take into account that many of the students involved will also be chronically absent, indicating that, to enable more students to succeed, schools need to combine efforts to reduce disciplinary incidents with efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism.

Figure 4 - Attendance Status by Disciplinary Incidents
Task Force & Comparison Schools, 2012-13
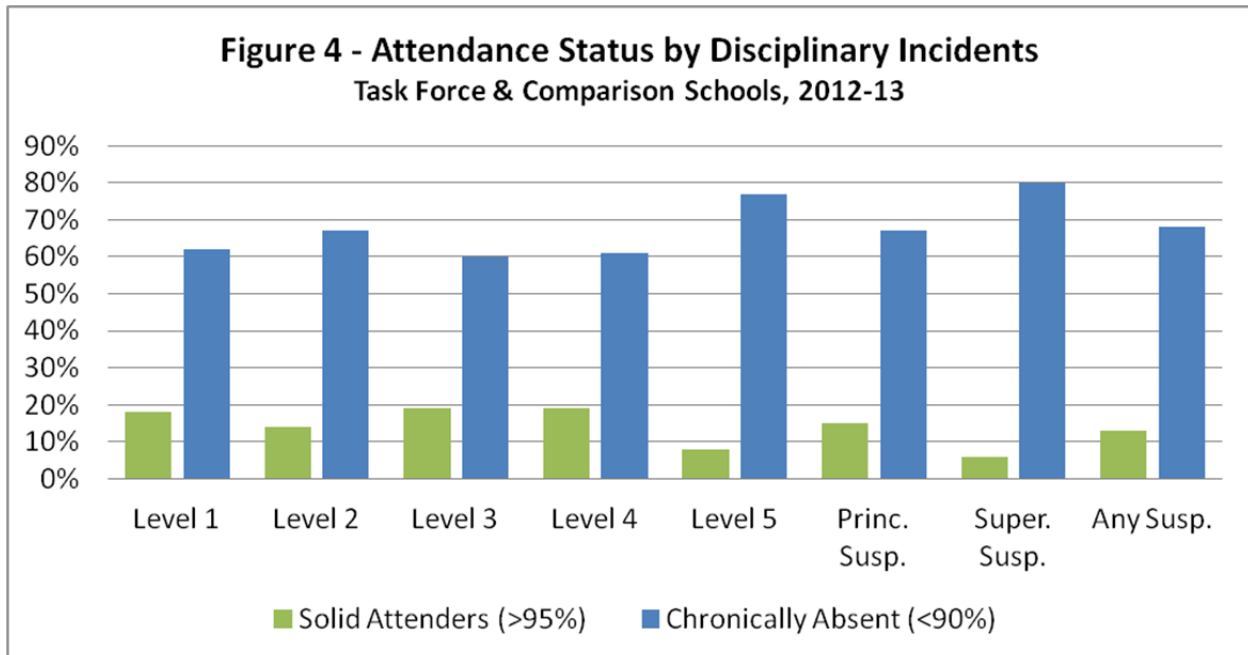
NYC Discipline Code and bill of Student Rights and Responsibilities, K-12 (Sept.2013) defines terms as follows:

> *Level 1 = uncooperative /noncompliant behavior*
> *Level 2 = Disorderly Behavior*
> *Level 3 = Disruptive Behavior*
> *Level 4 = Aggressive or Injurious/Harmful Behavior*
> *Level 5 = Seriously Dangerous or Violent Behavior*

Principal's Suspension can last from 1-5 days. Superintendent's Suspension is often sought for more serious offenses (levels 3-5) as listed in the Discipline Code, and can last for up to one year.

What both the achievement and disciplinary data show is that in schools in NYC with high rates of chronic absenteeism, missing school, struggling academically, and getting in trouble can go hand in hand. But that it is typically chronic absenteeism that comes first.

In sum, true to the goals of the task force, schools participating in the mayor's effort to combat chronic absenteeism faced significant attendance challenges. Elementary and middle schools, on average, had 30% to 40%, and high schools 50% of their students, missing 10% (essentially a month) or more of school. In most grades, chronically absent students outnumbered solid attenders, making it difficult for schools to deliver coherent instruction to even a majority of students. Most chronically absent students had histories of chronic absenteeism. Chronically absent students had much lower academic outcomes, and many more disciplinary incidents, than solid attenders.

Part 3: The Academic Impacts of Entering and Exiting Chronic Absenteeism

Both the NYC data and data from other locales clearly show that chronic absenteeism goes along with lower academic and behavioral outcomes (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Chronic absenteeism has also been well established as a strong predictor of dropping out of school (Balfanz, MacIver & Herzog, 2007 and Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Less well demonstrated to date is the extent to which exiting chronic absenteeism or improving attendance substantially (i.e. by two or more weeks) leads to improved academic outcomes, and entering chronic absenteeism leads to declining ones. This question has important policy implications. For instance, answering whether students who exit chronic absenteeism actually perform better academically and succeed in school or are destined for low achievement and dropping out can determine how much of the effort will be dedicated to getting kids to come to school every day. The large longitudinal data set for the task force and comparison schools made available for evaluation by the NYC Department of Education allows us to examine more closely the academic and school success impacts of exiting and entering chronic absenteeism, as well as those associated with substantially improving attendance.

The tables and charts show data for students who attended the 146 task force and comparison schools during the 2010-11 school year, and follow them from the prior year (2009-10) through to 2012-13. Four groups of students are examined: 1) students who were not chronically absent in either 2009-10 or 2010-11; 2) those who were chronically absent in 2009-10, but exited chronic absenteeism in 2010-11; 3) those who were not chronically absent in 2009-10, but entered chronic absenteeism in 2010-11; and 4) those who were chronically absent in both years. We also look at the subset of students who maintained their 2010-11 status in 2011-12, that is, students who exited chronic absenteeism in 2010-11 and maintained that status in 2011-12, and students who entered chronic absenteeism in 2010-11 and remained chronically absent in 2011-12. This information lets us examine the multi-year impacts of entering or exiting chronic absenteeism and maintaining that status for at least two consecutive years.

If entering chronic absenteeism leads to lower academic and behavioral outcomes, then we should see these outcomes declining in the year students become chronically absent and remaining low or lowering if chronic absenteeism continues. Conversely, if exiting chronic absenteeism leads to better academic and school success outcomes, we should see these outcomes improving as students exit chronic absenteeism and stay improved or improve further if students continue to be in school.

Overall, the results detailed below show that entering and exiting chronic absenteeism affects a range of academic and school success indicators and outcomes in educationally meaningful ways. All of the results reported below are statistically significant. The statistical models used and specific quantitative results achieved are available as a web-appendix at www.every1graduates.org.

Students who exit chronic absenteeism stay in school at rates 20 percentage points higher than students who enter chronic absenteeism.

The most dramatic impacts of entering or exiting chronic absenteeism can be seen on the extent to which students remain enrolled in school.[6] Here the pattern is clear. Students who were not chronically absent in 2009-10 and entered chronic absenteeism in 2010-11 fared as poorly as students who were already chronically absent in 2009-10: only about 75% of both groups were still enrolled in NYC schools the following year, and only 60% by 2012-13. In contrast, students who had been chronically absent in 2009-10 but ceased to be in 2010-11 remained in school at the same rate (90%) as students who were not chronically absent in 2009-10 or 2010-11. In fact, by 2012-13, the students who exited chronic absenteeism in 2010-11 had slightly higher enrollment rates than the students who were not chronically absent. As a result, two years later, the students who exited chronic absenteeism in 2010-11 remained enrolled in school at a rate 20 percentage points higher than the students who entered chronic absenteeism in 2010-11.

This 20 percentage-point impact of exiting vs. entering chronic absenteeism on staying in school can be linked to other important social outcomes, such as crime and the cost of unemployment, since incarceration rates are high and employment rates low for high school dropouts (Alliance for Excellent Education, *Saving Futures Saving Dollars* and *Well and Well-Off*, 2013). The mayor's task force was not in operation long enough to collect sufficient data to examine the impact of reducing chronic absenteeism on graduation rates. The evidence, however, is strong that students who exited chronic absenteeism were much more likely to still be in school the following year than students who entered chronic absenteeism. Once students drop out of school, the likelihood that they re-enter and successfully complete school is very low. **The New York City data indicate that helping students exit chronic absenteeism is one of the strongest dropout prevention strategies available, and suggest that chronic absenteeism is not only a good predictor of dropping out, but also a leading cause.**

> *The New York City data indicate that helping students exit chronic absenteeism is one of the strongest dropout prevention strategies available, and suggest that chronic absenteeism is not only a good predictor of dropping out, but also a leading cause.*

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[6] Students are enrolled in school if they are enrolled in any NYC public school. Students no longer enrolled either moved out of town, enrolled in a private school or dropped out.

Figure 5 - Enrollment Rates by Changes in Chronic Absentee Status from 2009-10 to 2010-11
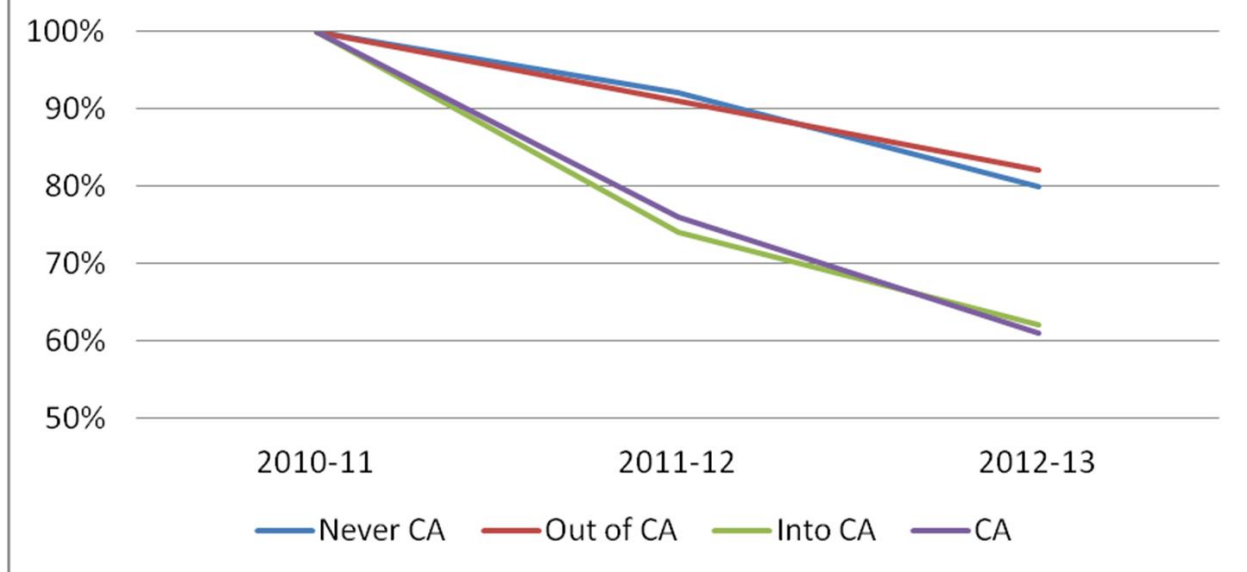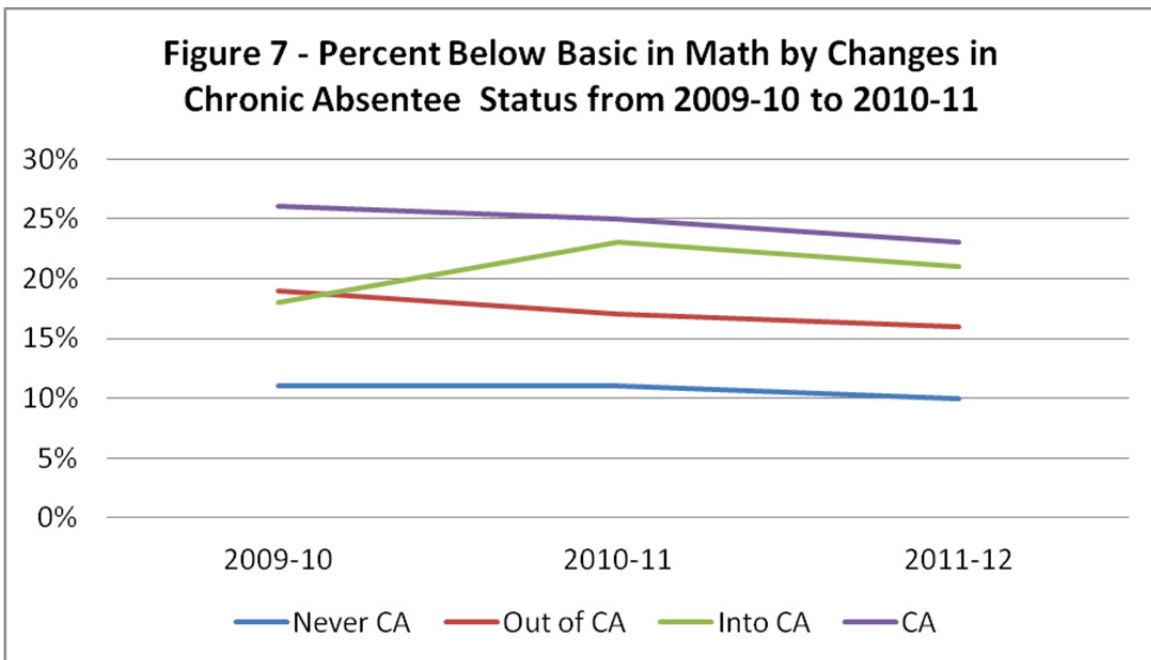
Students who exit chronic absenteeism see the rate at which they score Below Basic on state English and mathematics assessments decline, while students who enter chronic absenteeism see it increase.

The strongest academic achievement impacts were found for students scoring at the lowest levels—below basic—or receiving a 1 on New York's 1-to-4 state academic achievement index for students in grades 3 to 8. Here again we have clear evidence of students' academic outcomes improving or worsening after they exit or enter chronic absenteeism. Decreasing the number of students who score below basic is not a minor achievement. This is especially true from the perspective of the community, as high school dropouts who lack even basic skills are the least likely to find stable employment.

The chart below looks at the percent of students scoring below basic on the English language arts state assessment. Several points stand out. Between 2009-10 and 2011-12, there is modest improvement for both the students who were never chronically absent and those who remained chronically absent, perhaps indicating overall improvement across the city. The outcomes for students who entered chronic absenteeism in 2010-11 run counter to this trend; their performance worsens over time, and by 2011-12 they are doing as poorly as the students who were always chronically absent. By contrast, the students who exited chronic absenteeism in 2010-11 were performing worse in 2009-10 than the students who entered chronic absenteeism in 2010-11, but outperform them by 2011-12. It should be noted, though, that a considerable gap still exists between the performances of students who were never chronically absent and students who exited chronic absenteeism.

Figure 6 - Percent Below Basic in ELA by Changes in Chronic Absentee Status from 2009-10 to 2010-11
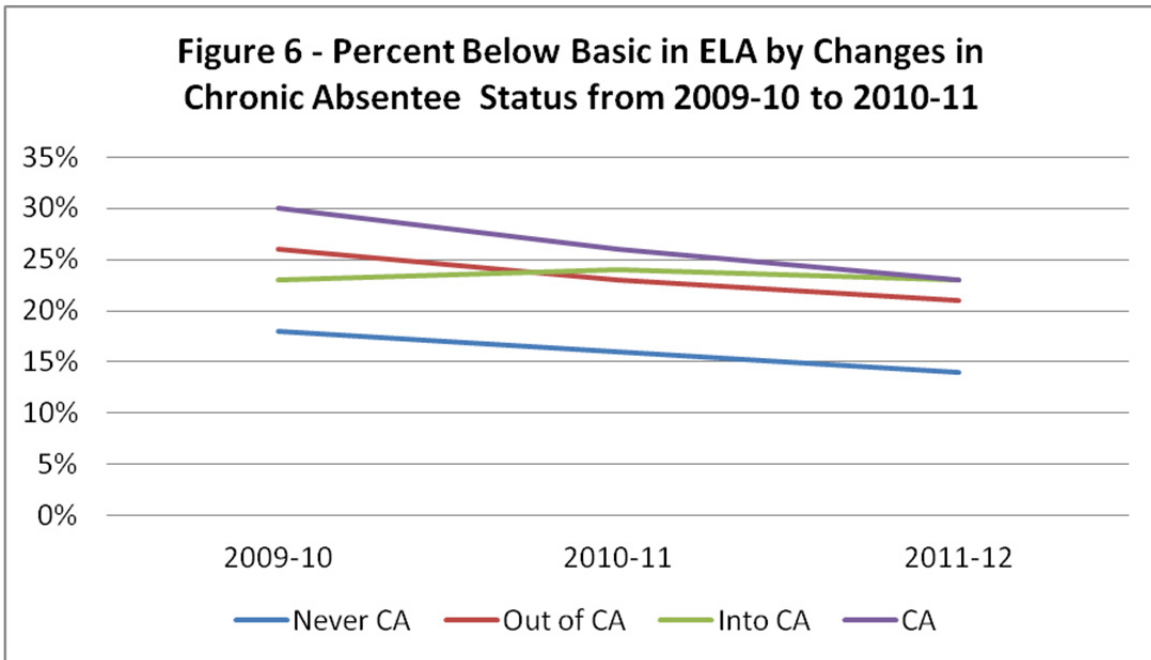
In mathematics a similar pattern is observed but with even greater divergence. Students who exited and entered chronic absenteeism in 2010-11 had similar performance levels in 2009-10, with students about to exit chronic absenteeism performing slightly worse. By 2011-12, students who exited chronic absenteeism in 2010-11 were performing substantially better (5 percentage points), with performance levels closer to students who had never been chronically absent than to those who remain so.

Figure 7 - Percent Below Basic in Math by Changes in Chronic Absentee Status from 2009-10 to 2010-11

One additional analysis further helps demonstrate that exiting and entering chronic absenteeism leads to changes in academic performance. If we look at just the students who exited and entered chronic absenteeism in 2010-11 and remained in that status in 2011-12, we can see even more pronounced impacts with students who exited chronic absenteeism continuing to improve in their second year in that status. We also see even larger gaps between these two groups in absolute performance by 2011-12, with a 5 percentage point difference in the percent below basic in English and a 10 percentage point gap in mathematics.

Table 4 - Students who enter and exit chronic absenteeism (CA) in 2010-11 and maintain that status in 2011-12: Percent below Basic

	ELA			Math		
	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Out of CA	25%	22%	20%	18%	16%	15%
Into CA	25%	26%	25%	20%	26%	25%

Students who exit chronic absenteeism increase the rate at which they score proficient on state achievement tests, while students who enter chronic absenteeism see their proficiency rates decline

We also find academic impacts of exiting chronic absenteeism at the other end of the achievement spectrum. The charts below show the percentage of students with scores of proficient or above (three or higher) on the state math and ELA exams for grades 3-8. Students who entered and exited chronic absenteeism in 2010-11 had equivalent proficiency rates in 2009-10, but those rates quickly diverge with the students' change in attendance status. Students who exited chronic absenteeism obtained achievement proficiency rates 9 percentage points higher in math, and 5 percentage points higher in English language arts, than students who became chronically absent.

Figure 8 - Percent Proficient or Above in Math by Changes in Chronic Absentee Status from 2009-10 to 2010-11
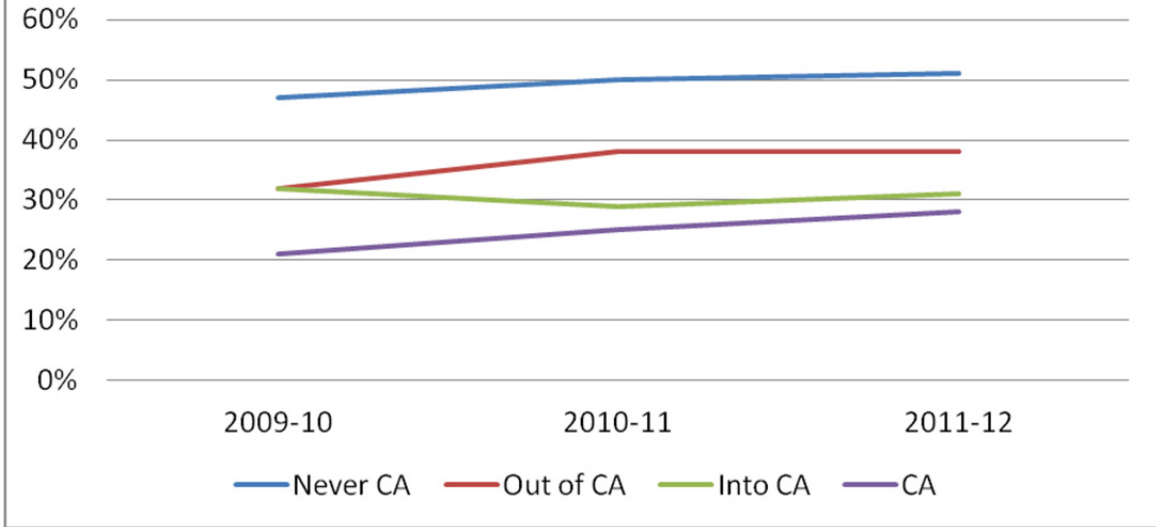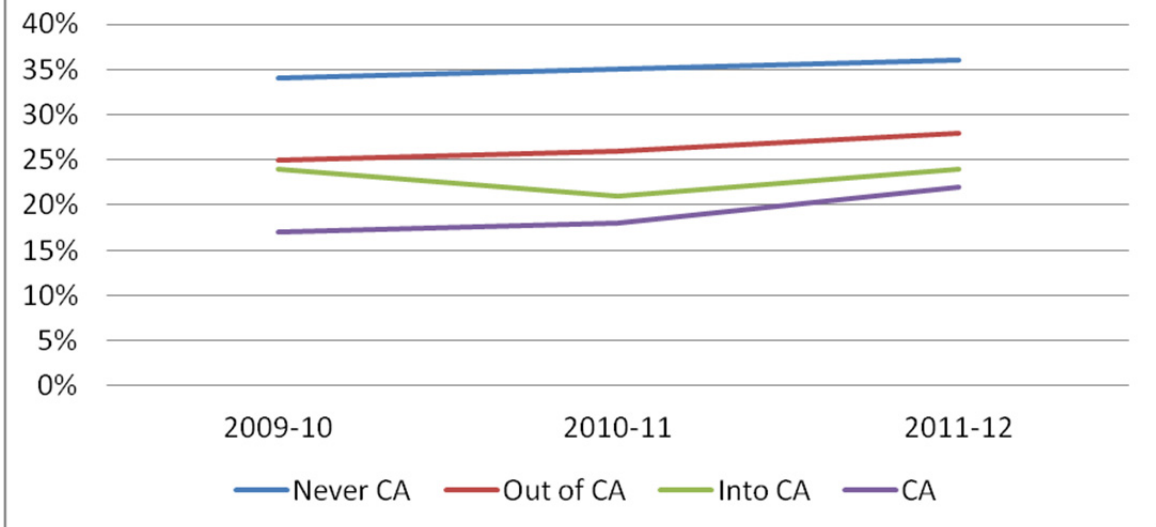

Figure 9 - Percent Proficient or Above in ELA by Changes in Chronic Absentee Status from 2009-10 to 2010-11

Students who exit chronic absenteeism see improved GPAs, while students who enter chronic absenteeism see declining GPAs.

A final academic area where we can see changes in academic performance linked to entering and exiting chronic absenteeism is high school GPA. In this analysis we are using cumulative GPAs, so small gains or decreases are still significant indicators that students are getting higher or lower grades. In Table 5, below, we can see that students who entered and exited chronic absenteeism in 2010-11 had identical GPAs of 72 in 2009-10. Students who exited chronic absenteeism saw their GPA rise to 73, while students who entered chronic absenteeism saw theirs fall to 69 or from the C range to the D range. When we look at students who exited chronic absenteeism and remained in that status for two years, we see that their GPAs continued to rise an additional point in the second year, and students who remain chronically absent saw theirs continue to fall. Finally, if we look at the students who exited chronic absenteeism in 2010-11 but became chronically absent again in 2011-12 we see their GPA first rise and then fall (this table can be found in the appendix).

Table 5. Trends in Cumulative High School GPA by Changes in Chronic Absentee Status (CA) from 2009-10 to 2010-11

GPA	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Never CA	80%	79%	78%
Out of CA	72%	73%	73%
Into CA	72%	69%	67%
CA	63%	63%	63%

When we examine the gap in performance between students who exit and enter chronic absenteeism and maintain that status for two years, we see the full benefit of combating chronic absenteeism.

The data from New York City make it clear that exiting chronic absenteeism brings academic gains, and entering chronic absenteeism leads to academic declines. Table 6 brings these two outcomes together for students who entered and exited chronic absenteeism with initially similar levels of performance and remained in that new status for two consecutive years. This highlights the benefits to be gained by both preventing chronic absenteeism from occurring and intervening to reverse its course when it does occur.

Table 6. Gap in academic outcomes and staying in school between students* who exit chronic absenteeism and students who enter chronic absenteeism after two years

Percent Still in School	Percent Proficient Math Grades 3-8	Percent Proficient English Grades 3-8	HS GPA
+ 20	+ 9	+ 5	+6

*Students have similar levels of performance at baseline

Students whose attendance improves by two weeks or more also see academic gains.

Exiting chronic absenteeism occurs when a student attends at least 91% of the time. Depending on students' prior level of attendance, this could require a rather small improvement (e.g., going from missing 21 to 17 days of school) or a very large improvement (e.g., going from missing 50 to 17 days). Alternatively, students who are severely chronically absent—missing 36 or more days of school—can improve their attendance by a large amount and still be chronically absent. For this reason, we also examined the academic impacts of an alternative measure of improved attendance: increasing attendance by 10 or more days (or two or more weeks.) We found significant positive relationships between improving attendance by 10 or more days and decreasing the odds of being below basic in math, of increasing the odds of being proficient in math and ELA, high school credits earned, cumulative high school GPA, and passing Regents exams in high school. The magnitude of these gains is educationally meaningful, but not as great as the results achieved for exiting chronic absenteeism (see Appendix 1).

In total, examining the academic and school success outcomes over time for students who enter and exit chronic absenteeism empirically demonstrates that to succeed in school, you need to attend school. It also shows that the negative academic effects of chronic absenteeism are reversible or can be attenuated, once students start to attend school again on a more regular basis.

In total, examining the academic and school success outcomes over time for students who enter and exit chronic absenteeism empirically demonstrates that to succeed in school, you need to attend school. It also shows that the negative academic effects of chronic absenteeism are reversible or can be attenuated, once students start to attend school again on a more regular basis. When we combine this finding with the findings from the prior sections, which showed that chronic absenteeism seldom self-corrects and left unattended results in a wide range of social and economic costs, a compelling rationale for organized and comprehensive efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism and increase school attendance results. In the last section of the paper, we turn our attention to examining the extent to which the Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism & School Engagement succeeded in its efforts to increase school attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism in schools with above average rates of chronic absenteeism.

Part 4: Overall Impact of the Mayor's Task Force School-Level Chronic Absenteeism Prevention and Intervention Programs

In this section we analyze the impacts for the schools and students that participated in the pilot and field testing of the chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention efforts designed by the mayor's task force.

School Impacts

Our first analysis below uses school-level data to examine the impact of the mayor's task force on rates of chronic absenteeism in schools.

Using multi-level (hierarchical linear) regression models, we created trend lines for the percent of students who were chronically absent at four different groups of schools: (1) the 25 schools that started participating in the task force programs during the 2010-11 school year (the first year of intervention); (2) the 25 schools that started in 2011-12 (year 2); (3) another 50 schools that started in year three (2012-13); and (4) 46 comparison schools that did not participate in any of the interventions but had similar initial rates of chronically absent, free/reduced lunch eligible, and limited English proficiency students. The estimates model chronic absentee rates at the schools on a monthly basis over four school years, from the start of the 2009-10 school year (the year before campaign kick-off) through February 2013. An example of what this looks like for the high schools is provided in the appendix.

In essence, the results are what is typically referred to as an 'interrupted time-series' design, showing changes in each group's trend lines from before implementation to after, while also including the matched control group of non-pilot schools as an added point of comparison. The design thus offers two counterfactuals of what chronic absence levels would have looked like at the pilot schools had they not participated in the new programs and thereby allows us to estimate the programs' impacts. First, we are able to compare the pilot schools' post-implementation chronic absence levels to their levels before they started the programs. Second, we are able to compare their levels, as well as any changes over time, to the trends at the control schools, which assures us that any changes seen in the pilot schools' chronic absence levels that aren't also seen in the control schools are in fact due to the program impact and not to historical events in a given year, or to improvements that were being made district-wide through other efforts or programs.

The Key Overall School-Level Finding Is:

- All three waves of schools that participated in the chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention programs from 2010-11 to 2012-13 did better than the comparison schools in reducing their rates of chronic absenteeism. The differences were statistically significant.

The first group of participating schools began with significantly higher chronic absence rates than comparison schools in 2009-10, but reduced the gap in post-implementation years. The second and third groups of participating schools both began with chronic absence rates equivalent to those of comparison schools, but had lower rates of chronic absence than comparison schools after initiating program participation.

While the overall program impact was to reduce chronic absence rates at participating schools by 1.5 percentage points, there were substantial differences between the groups of schools, and across the years of participation. For the first group of schools, the program impact was 1.5 percentage points in year 2010-11, 3.7 percentage points in 2011-12, and 1.5 percentage points in 2012-13 (statistically significant difference in 2011-12). For the second group of schools, the impact was 2.4 percentage points in 2011-12 and 2.3 percentage points in 2012-13 (statistically significant in both years). For the third group of schools, impact was 0.9 percentage points in 2012-13, their only year of implementation.

This pattern of impacts across the groups of schools and years of implementation is not unexpected. The first year was a pilot year, in which the intervention and the types of implementation support required were still being fine-tuned. These enhancements then helped the second cohort of schools have stronger initial impacts and the first cohort to improve. Implementation fidelity often wanes over time, and perhaps this is seen in the lessening of impacts in year 3 among the first cohort of schools. The third cohort of schools, those that started in 2012-13, faced both external shocks in the form of a hurricane and bus strike, and also came into the program as it doubled from 50 to 100 schools. What is quite remarkable, however, is that including the pilot year, and despite rapid expansion from 25 to 50 to 100 schools in three years, the participating schools nearly always outperformed the control schools.

The size of the improvements in chronic absentee rates for the participating school groups ranges from .06 to .26 in terms of effect sizes, depending on group and year. The overall estimate of program impact (1.5 percentage points) is equivalent to an effect size of 0.14, considered educationally meaningful when applied to a large population (as it was). Thus, the overall better performance of the schools implementing the chronic absenteeism program was not the average of results derived from some participating schools doing much better than the control schools, others about the same, and some worse. What varied was the extent to which participating schools did better than comparison schools. **This suggests robustness to the reform: variation in implementation conditions influenced the extent of impact, but positive impact was almost always achieved across varied implementation conditions.**

Student Impacts

The same analyses were then repeated using individual student data and three-level models for students nested within years/cohorts, nested within schools. Similar to the school-level analyses, the models controlled for school characteristics such as school size and percentage of minority students, as well as individual students' characteristics, such as gender, race, grade level, special education and ELL statuses, free/reduced lunch eligibility, temporary shelter status, and overage-for-grade status. The specific outcome modeled was whether an individual student would be chronically absent or not, with the results expressed in terms of a student's probability of being chronically absent. Interactions between treatment effect and all student and school characteristics were also tested.

The Key Overall Student-Level Findings are:

- Low-income (free/reduced lunch-eligible) students were 15% less likely to be chronically absent if attending a task force school than one of the comparison schools.
- Students in temporary shelters who attended task force schools were 31% less likely to be chronically absent.
- Overall program impact was statistically significant ($p < .001$), and students who attended one of the participating schools were on average 9% less likely to be chronically absent than students who attended one of the comparison schools, and 7% less likely to be severely chronically absent ($p < .050$).
- Students who attended one of the participating schools were also significantly more likely (8%) to be "solid attenders" with attendance rates at or above 95%.

The first two results are particularly important. High-poverty students benefit the most from improved school attendance (Balfanz & Byrnes 2012), while students in temporary shelters have among the highest rates of chronic absenteeism. The fact that two of the most vulnerable student populations experienced the greatest impacts indicates that the task force's efforts were well targeted and effective for the students most in need of additional support to get to school.

Overall, the student-level results followed the same pattern as those from school-level data. Differences between students at participating schools and students at comparison schools were improved in years following program implementation, with results being strongest for students at the first two groups of schools (statistically significant in 2010-11 and 2011-12), and less so for students at the third group of schools.

As noted in the school section, there are two potential reasons why there were fewer impacts in the schools that started in the third year of the program, 2012-13. Two historic events, a hurricane and a bus strike, disrupted attendance in some schools more than others and, in some implementing schools, may have diverted administrator attention from chronic absenteeism efforts for a period of time. In addition, the third-year schools were selected in a different manner. To broaden and institutionalize the task force's efforts, scale-up occurred in

the third year via NYC Department of Education's network structure, and therefore, entire networks of schools were brought on to implement the chronic absenteeism program with support through the existing network structure. As a result, 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 because they automatically were part of the pilot through the networks. On the other hand, many year three schools and entire networks of schools had strong building and network level buy-in and outcomes. Thus, the overall results in year three schools were more mixed. Because the more global selection criteria based on network affiliation occurred in the same year as the hurricane and the bus strike, however, it is not possible to determine, or even infer, the extent the external events or the form of scale-up in year three contributed to smaller overall impacts. To determine this, it will be necessary to look at year two impacts for the third cohort in future research studies.

Repeated statistical models were also run for different student outcomes, such as suspension rates and achievement outcomes (GPA, credit accumulation, and test scores). While students at participating schools consistently had more positive academic outcomes than students attending comparison schools controlling for multiple student and school factors, the differences were only statistically significant for the odds of being chronically absent, and not for other measured outcomes.

Signature Effort of Task Force Had Large Impacts on the School Attendance of Homeless Students

The task force partnered with the NY Department of Homeless Services to examine chronic absenteeism at 15 homeless family shelters and create a "culture of school attendance and success." First-ever data-sharing agreements between the Departments of Education and Homeless Services allowed shelter staff to access student data to facilitate placements providing the opportunity for students to remain at their school of origin, and help improve their attendance and achievement. The percentage of families placed in the school district of their youngest child doubled as a result of these and other efforts. In addition, after creating Homework Centers at the 15 pilot shelters, the DHS Commissioner directed that such centers be established at all NYC family shelters. Homeless students participating in these efforts by attending task force schools were 31% less likely to be chronically absent.

Specific Impact of the NYC Success Mentor Corps Program

The mayor's task force as detailed in section 1 and the appendix was a comprehensive effort involving multiple components. The central school-level intervention was its Success Mentor Corps Program and the supporting infrastructure, including the weekly principal-led student success meeting. The analyses presented above evaluated the impacts of the task force's efforts as a whole on the participating schools and their students. Below, we report on a second set of analyses that focuses solely on the Success Mentoring component and its impacts on the individual students who received mentoring.

Specifically, we reran the above analyses and same multi-level models based upon student-level data, but with impact measured through an indicator of which individual students received personal mentoring as part of the NYC Success Mentor Corps Program. These analyses were also conducted with a reduced sample to include only those students who had been chronically absent in the prior year, as this was the primary criterion for determining which students would receive mentoring. Thus, only students who were chronically absent the prior year (but did not receive mentoring) from both the task force and comparison schools are included as a counterfactual to estimate the impact of mentoring on student outcomes. Similarly, some students who were mentored are not included in the analyses—those who were *not* chronically absent in the year prior to mentoring, but were selected for mentoring either because they were chronically absent in the early part of the year in which they were mentored, or because they exhibited other distress or disengagement signals early in the year.

Success Mentee Year End Survey Results, 2012-13 (N=1293):

- 91% of students liked having a mentor this year
- 92% of students said that other students would benefit from having a mentor
- 75% of students said a mentor helped them improve their attendance
- 79% of students said a mentor improved their grades or quality of work
- 84% of students said a mentor motivated them to do well in school
- 84% of students said a mentor helped them feel more confident in themselves

Key Findings on Impact of Success Mentors Program

- Students with histories of chronic absenteeism who received individual mentoring had significantly higher attendance rates (5 percentage points higher on average, p < .000; ES = 0.19). These gains correspond to about two additional weeks of schooling in a year. Analysis in section 3 demonstrated that gains of this magnitude are educationally meaningful.

- In total, the 10,804 students who were supported by Success Mentors between 2010-11 and 2012-13, and who had been chronically absent the prior school year, gained 92,277 additional days of schooling more than chronically absent students without mentors at the comparison schools. .

- High school students with histories of chronic absenteeism who were supported by Success Mentors were 52% more likely to remain in school the following year than comparison students who did not have a Success Mentor. They also earned more high school credits (0.9 more on average, p < .010; ES = 0.05).

- The impact of mentoring on student attendance rates was also particularly strong for students who were overage for their grade level. Overage students who were chronically absent in the prior year and received mentoring improved their attendance rates by 6.5 percentage points on average, earned 1.3 more credits, increased their cumulative GPA by 0.8 points, were 17% less likely to be severely chronically absent, and 34% more likely to still be enrolled in the NYC school system the following year.

- As seen in the box above, a very high percent (75% to 91%) of mentees reported that they liked having a mentor and that their mentor helped them improve their attendance, schoolwork, motivation and confidence.

The impact of Success Mentors on school attendance was independent of school quality/school environment ratings but also additive to it.

We ran additional statistical models that include school accountability report grades. These additional models were run to assess how much of the estimated impacts of Success Mentors may have been related to overall levels of school quality, environment, or leadership. These analyses showed that while measures of school quality from the school progress reports were positively and significantly related to student outcomes including attendance, they were not related to the impacts of the Success Mentors. These sub-analyses did, however, provide an informative comparison. A school improving its overall performance grade by one mark (e.g., from a C to a B) had the estimated effect of raising an individual student's attendance rate by 1.25 percentage points. Compared to this, the estimated impact of having a mentor was to raise student attendance rates by 5 percentage points, which is the equivalent impact to having a student move from a school with an overall grade of F to a school with an overall grade of A. This tells us the school and leadership quality do affect student attendance but that direct student supports can increase it more, and that the effects are additive. **Hence, the best strategy to increase attendance is to improve school quality and enhance direct student supports**.

Success Mentors had impact on student attendance in most schools. In a quarter of the schools impacts were very high and in another quarter very low.

Table 7 below shows that in the top quartile (25%) of schools the average gain in attendance was 12.7 percentage points or more than a month of schooling and in the second quartile it was 6.8 percentage points or about 12 days. Thus, in half the participating schools mentors enabled their mentees to gain between two weeks and a month of schooling. The table also shows that in a quarter of the schools, Success Mentors had no overall impact on improving attendance. The table also shows that transfer schools were over-represented and elementary and middle schools under-represented among the schools with the biggest gains. This may be directly tied to the fact that students in transfer schools had the worst overall attendance and hence had the greatest room to improve. It is also noteworthy, however, that elementary and middle schools are also over-represented among the schools that saw no gains, indicating that at least within a subset of participating elementary and middle schools the Success Mentor program may not have been sufficiently implemented or as effective. Overall implementation reviews by the task force and its technical assistance providers rated 69 of the participating schools in 2012-13 as full Success Mentor program implementers, 24 as obtaining mixed levels of implementation and seven as not implementing.

Table 7. Impact of Success Mentors on Days of Attendance by Quartile, for Task Force Schools

Quartile	Average Impact	% ES	% MS	% HS	% TS
4th	12.7	20%	16%	32%	32%
3rd	6.8	32%	20%	36%	12%
2nd	3.4	32%	40%	24%	4%
1st	0.2	40%	40%	16%	4%

Different types of Success Mentoring models had similar impacts.

As noted in the introduction, the mayor's task force developed three main types of Success Mentor models — internal (school staff), external (non-profit partners) and peer-based. Most schools implemented either the internal or the external Success Mentor model and it is for these two models that there is sufficient data to compare and contrast outcomes. For both the internal (school staff) and external (non-profit) models the primary impacts on attendance were the same. The external (non-profit) model, however, also had impacts on high school students' credit accrual.

The fact that both the internal and external Success Mentor models had equivalent impacts on students' attendance rates is an important practical and policy point for other districts seeking to replicate such an effort. It shows that either model can be used without lessoning the effect on student attendance. Using internal school staff (teachers during service periods, administrators, coaches, non-teaching staff, etc.) in some districts may be more economical or more available than partnering with non-profits. Specific situations and financial formulas for each district vary, however, and for some districts the use of external community partners (national service corps members, social work students, retired professionals, etc.) may be the more cost-effective and flexible resource. The critical factor is that whatever mentoring model is used, it needs to replicate the intensity and focus exhibited by both the internal and external models in NYC, i.e. being in schools at least 3 days/15 hours a week, working with a defined and manageable caseload of students, having direct access to the attendance data of the students they mentor, being able to link students with pressing out-of-school issues with professional supports, and having a voice in weekly principal-led student success meetings.

Across 100 task force schools in 2012-13, almost half of the students who were chronically absent the year before had a Success Mentor.

Success Mentors were primarily assigned to students who were chronically absent the prior school year, and were also assigned to students who became chronically absent or were in danger of becoming so during the current school year. In 2012-13, across the participating schools, 6,037 students who had been chronically absent the year before had Success Mentors. Given that the task force directed its efforts to the schools with above average rates of chronic absenteeism and, as noted at the outset of the report, that chronic absenteeism in the task force schools was in many grades the norm, it is not surprising that all students who were eligible for a Success Mentor did not receive one. Across the 100 schools participating in the task force's efforts in 2012-13, 43% of students chronically absent in 2011-12 received the supports of either an internal or external Success Mentor. Moreover, given wide variation in the size of schools participating and the numbers of mentors available in each school, there was considerable variation across the task force schools in 2012-13 in the percent of eligible students who received Success Mentors. In the top quarter of schools, 71% or more of eligible students received a Success Mentor, compared to 19% or less in the bottom quarter of schools. Because of differences in school size, it is also not surprising that elementary schools were over-represented in the top quartile of schools with the greatest coverage of chronically absent students, and high schools were over-represented in the lowest quartile with the least coverage. In terms of the number of students mentored, in the top quarter of schools in 2012-13, 81 or more chronically absent students per school received mentors compared to 22 or fewer in the bottom quarter of schools.

Most of the mentored students' attendance was so poor the prior year that they could improve their attendance by two weeks and still be chronically absent.

Among mentored students, most had very poor attendance the year before being mentored. On average the prior year attendance rate of mentored students was 75.6% and they had missed 42 days of school, qualifying them as severely chronically absent. This explains why, on average, when mentored students gained nearly two weeks of schooling, they did not exit chronic absenteeism. Those mentored students who did exit chronic absence status had a prior average attendance rate of 85% and had missed on average 27 days of school.

Summary and Implications of Impact Analyses

Overall, the impact analyses indicate that the NYC Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism & School Engagement succeeded in its core objectives. The task force was able to develop a set of intervention and prevention strategies that could be supported mainly through the strategic reallocation of existing resources and implement them in high-poverty and high-minority schools with above-average rates of chronic absenteeism to good effect. **The impacts on chronic absenteeism and school attendance were statistically significant and educationally important. More students attended school and more students succeeded in school because of the task force's efforts**. The modest cost of the effort when examining its impacts also needs to be taken into account. Consider, for example, the finding that chronically absent students who were supported by a Success Mentor gained on average about two weeks of additional schooling. This is equivalent to adding 20 minutes a day or an hour and 40 minutes per week with lower costs than typically incurred when learning time is extended. The wide range of critical impacts can be seen below.

Key Findings of Impact Analyses

- Task force schools significantly and consistently outperformed comparison schools in reducing chronic absenteeism.
- The greatest impacts on chronic absenteeism were achieved for two key target groups of the initiative: high-poverty minority students and students in temporary shelters.
- Over three years, the task force was able to scale its chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention program to 100 schools and obtain reasonable implementation levels in the vast majority of them. Most school districts will have 50 or fewer schools with high rates of chronic absenteeism.
- Success Mentors and the infrastructure that supported them were the most effective component of the task force's prevention and intervention program.
- Students with a history of chronic absenteeism who received a Success Mentor, on average, gained almost two weeks of schooling.
- In the 25% of schools with the greatest impacts, chronically absent students supported by Success Mentors gained, on average, more than a month of school.

- In total, mentored students who had previously been chronically absent gained 51,562 days of schooling in 2012-13 and 92,277 days throughout the three years of the initiative.
- High school students who had a Success Mentor were 52% more likely to remain in school the following year than equivalent comparison students who did not have mentors. This suggests that combating chronic absenteeism in high school with Success Mentors is also a powerful dropout prevention strategy.
- Chronically absent students who were overage for grade particularly benefitted from Success Mentors, showing a wide range of academic improvements.
- School climate, leadership, and quality affected chronic absenteeism, but improving these are not substitutes for direct action to reduce chronic absenteeism. Schools with high and low accountability grades can have high rates of chronic absenteeism and school climate, leadership, and quality did not impact the extent to which mentors improved the attendance of chronically absent students. The greatest declines in chronic absenteeism will likely occur in schools that improve overall and take direct steps to reduce chronic absenteeism, including the use of mentors.
- Because the largest driver of improvement, the Success Mentor component, reached only 43% of the students in the task force schools who were chronically absent the prior year, most of whom were severely chronically absent the prior year, not enough of the students improved their attendance or exited chronic absenteeism for the observed positive impacts on other academic outcomes (such as GPA and test scores) at the school or student level to reach statistical significance.
- The weakest outcomes were achieved in the third year of the effort, when the number of participating schools doubled from 50 to 100 *and* NYC was hit with a hurricane and experienced a school bus strike.
- Most of the task force's school-based efforts where accomplished by reassigning funding and people, both school staff personnel and non-profit partners. In short, greater impact was achieved by using existing assets more strategically and in an integrated, evidence-driven fashion.
- Where additional investment appears to have paid off is in providing technical assistance to support implementation at the school level, and to provide training and knowledge-building opportunities to principals, Success Mentors, and Success Mentor support organizations.

The impact analyses also suggest a number of avenues where the task force's efforts could be improved, refined, or studied more, to further enhance impact.

More Success Mentors are needed.

On average, Success Mentors improved attendance by almost two weeks. Improvements of this size have been linked to a wide range of academic improvements from course credits earned to course grades, test scores, and staying in school. Yet only 43% of students in task force schools who were chronically absent the prior year had a mentor, and none of the chronically absent students in the control schools did. Thus, it seems clear that more Success Mentors would be better. The one caveat is that considerable care was taken by the task force to both (1) insure a substantial and sustained interaction between mentors and mentees, with Success Mentors working for the full school year and being in the school at least three days a week, and (2) provide training, tools, and on-going networking opportunities to support and build mentors' skills. Perhaps most importantly, the task force made sure, by brokering data-sharing agreements that benefited greatly from the support of the mayor's office, that Success Mentors could have direct access to their mentees' attendance data without having to go through school personnel. Finally, while analytically we were able to isolate the impact of having a Success Mentor, this still occurred within the full set of reforms implemented in task force schools, including the weekly principal-led student success meeting. Hence, the task force's mentoring technology and the accompanying interventions were quite different from mentoring as it is often conceived and practiced. Efforts to replicate and scale the NYC task force approach should take care to implement the complete effort, and not just assign willing adults as mentors without the time commitments, structures, supports, and trainings embedded in the task force's efforts.

Strategic targeting might increase the impact of Success Mentors.

In the task force schools, mentors were largely assigned to the neediest students. While the logic of this choice is clear, it is possible that based on what has been learned of the impact of the task force's efforts, that more strategic deployments are possible. An argument can be made that three different sets of students would benefit the most from Success Mentors. The first are students who missed between 20 and 30 days of schooling the prior year. These are the students who, if they achieve the average impact associated with a Success Mentor and improve their attendance by two weeks, would exit chronic absenteeism. Although significant academic benefits occur by gaining two weeks of school, the greatest returns are achieved by students who exit chronic absenteeism; thus, ensuring mentors for students who with the assistance of a Success Mentor *could* exit chronic absenteeism could maximize the impact of available Success Mentors. The one caveat to this approach is that impact data also show that in the 25% of schools in which Success Mentors had the greatest impact, they were able to help students gain a month or more of schooling. Thus, further study of these high-performing Success Mentors could lead to the identification of specific skills or tactics that could improve Success Mentoring overall, and enable Success Mentors to move students with even poorer levels of attendance out of chronic absenteeism. The other groups of students for whom the impact data strongly indicate preference in mentor assignment are chronically absent students

who are overage for grade, and high school students who were chronically absent the prior year. For the former, the impacts of Success Mentors are particularly large, and for the later, exiting chronic absenteeism is critical if they are to remain in school.

Schools need to prevent students who were not chronically absent the prior year from becoming chronically absent in the current year.

One of the biggest struggles faced by the task force was the fact that so many students in the most challenged schools were not just chronically absent the prior year (i.e. missed 10% of school) but severely chronically absent (i.e. missed 20% or more of school). As a result, even with substantial improvement in attendance, they still remained chronically absent. This strongly suggests that for the task force's efforts to be maximized, the number of severely chronically absent students needs to be reduced and the most effective strategy for this could be prevention rather than intervention. Schools should closely monitor students without a history of chronic absenteeism; when these students start trending toward chronic absenteeism, schools should mobilize to prevent it. If the student was not chronically absent the prior year, movement toward chronic absenteeism in the current year signals a change in the student's life or attitude toward schooling. Such recent changes, if identified promptly and addressed, may well be more amenable to intervention and improvement. With this group of students, also, improved partnerships with other city agencies might prove most effective for the same reason. This then suggests a two-part strategy: (1) Success Mentors assigned to students who missed between 20 and 30 days the prior year and overage-for-grade students with histories of chronic absenteeism; and (2) intense school focus on preventing students from becoming chronically absent and certainly from exceeding 30 days of absenteeism. If applied across all schools with significant rates of chronic absenteeism over several years, this strategy could drive down chronic absenteeism rates citywide.

The implementation and design of the task force's model in the middle grades needs further investigation.

Middle schools were over-represented among the schools in which Success Mentors had their smallest impact, and under-represented in the schools where they had their greatest impacts. Overall, the smallest number of students in task force schools exited chronic absenteeism in the middle schools. Thus, closer analysis is required to see if and why these schools achieved lower levels of implementation or if there is something about the task force approach or Success Mentor model that does not align as well with chronically absent middle grade students in highly challenged schools.

Impacts in the schools that first implemented the task force model in 2012-13 should be examined after a second year of implementation.

It will be important to ultimately understand if the lower impacts observed in the third year of the task force's effort when the chronic absenteeism program was expanded from 50 to 100 schools were primarily the result of one-time external shocks—the hurricane and school bus strike—or if they reflect the way the model was scaled up in the third year. In most school districts there will not be more than 50 schools with high rates of chronic absenteeism, but for the largest cities, such as Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, Miami, and a few others, it will be important to learn how best to expand effective approaches to chronic absenteeism to 100 schools or more. This is something that NYC will continue to explore as it moves forward with plans for large-scale expansion and extends the programs to more than 800 schools across the city.

The power of mayor-led collaboration to combat chronic absenteeism should be further documented.

It seems clear that the collaboration between the Mayor's Office and NYC Department of Education enabled the chronic absenteeism efforts to spread more quickly and more effectively than if either group had tried to combat chronic absenteeism alone. It is also clear that the focus on the attendance of students in temporary shelters also paid large dividends, with students in temporary shelters 30% less likely to be chronically absent in task force schools. It was beyond the scope of this evaluation to examine more closely which elements of the interagency task force were the most critical or the least developed. Such information, however, will ultimately be useful in helping to scale and sustain similar efforts in other cities.

Part 5: Next Steps—Institutionalizing the Task Force Efforts

The education department and other key city agencies are working to establish system-wide practices to ensure that the task force's core initiatives are institutionalized and sustained for all NYC schools—and are focused on that work for the 2013-14 school year. Although these efforts are beyond the scope and timeline of this report, they are listed below to provide a sense of how the task force is building upon what it has learned to share its work more broadly across the city.

This includes:

Expanded Data Tools & Accountability Measures

- Chronic absenteeism flags are now an automatic part of the citywide DOE database, so schools can easily identify and be alerted to students who are chronically absent, or at risk of becoming, so with "early warning" indicators.
- Accountability measures are being expanded to ensure a sustained focus on chronic absenteeism, including making chronic absenteeism part of the school evaluation process and the DOE school "progress reports."
- Chronic absenteeism rates for each NYC school will be publicly available on the DOE website, along with attendance.
- The 100 pilot schools, and schools citywide that are implementing the Success Mentor model, will have access to the task force's Data Dashboard going forward; DOE plans to expand dashboard access to additional schools as technology permits.

Success Mentors Citywide

- The Success Mentor model is being expanded citywide with the goal of reaching at least 800 high-needs schools, along with an expanded role for the task force's technical advisor team to assist schools with implementation.
- All Success Mentors in the NYC school system will be entitled to access data for their mentees post task force (ABCs — Attendance, Behavior, & Coursework), accomplished by expanding the task force confidentiality agreement to schools citywide. Success Mentors will also be trained in how to use the data to maximize student outcomes, and in best mentoring practices, as learned from the task force pilot program.

Spreading the Word System-Wide & Culture Shift

- DOE professional responsibility trainings and materials for principals, staff and network leaders now highlight the urgent problem of chronic absenteeism – and make the connection between absenteeism and student achievement. In this way, DOE's leadership has reported a "culture shift" in the way DOE thinks about attendance; the goal is to expand that even further.
- The DOE Principals' Academy, Parent Academy, Network Trainings, principal website portals, and general website now highlight the challenge of chronic absenteeism, as well as the best practice strategies to combat it.
- In the 2013-14 school year, 15 former pilot schools have been selected by DOE to serve as model schools for the 1,700 schools in New York City. The model schools, which were selected based on their individual strengths in implementing the initiatives, will serve as ambassadors for the task force's work. The schools will host site visits for other schools interested in implementing the program, providing schools outside of the pilot with the opportunity to see its work in action.
- In addition, DOE will use its network system (which oversees groups of schools) to disseminate the model to more schools throughout the five boroughs.

New Frame around Chronic Absenteeism

- Chronic absenteeism is now embedded in system wide strategies to drive improved academic achievement.

Outside of DOE: Interagency Efforts

- *Students in Temporary Housing:* New York City family homeless shelters now have attendance and absenteeism as a built-in part of their accountability process. Attendance rates for family (Tier 2) shelters will be a metric that will be included in monthly shelter reports and progress reports.
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Department of Homeless Services and DOE allows for data sharing going forward; the two agencies have built an infrastructure that ensures a partnership to tackle this issue.

Other Initiatives:

- Wake Up! NYC will be offered to all students in NYC post-pilot, providing celebrity wake-up calls with inspirational messages. The Manhattan Engagement Center for Truancy Prevention will continue to be a resource for schools, parents, police, and probation, and intends to expand to other boroughs.

Tool Kit for Other Cities

Other cities have begun to borrow from the NYC model, and to that end, the task force created a web-based Tool Kit that can be found at www.nyc.gov/EveryStudent

Many cities are using this as the basis of their efforts to tackle this issue.

Conclusion

Just as hospitals learned that bacteria could be better controlled by a combination of data, tools, and joint accountability, and that doing so would save many lives, the efforts of the Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism & School Engagement in New York City have shown that city agencies can be organized, through actionable data, tools, evidence-based processes and shared accountability, to significantly decrease the number of students who are chronically absent and to increase school attendance. In so doing, they can change lives for the better, while making their cities stronger.

The report also shows that students who exit chronic absenteeism or improve their attendance by two weeks or more reap substantial academic benefits, and that such improvement can be made using relatively low-cost efforts based largely on the reallocation and improved use of existing resources. This means the return on investment is high. Students who exit chronic absenteeism see their academic performance improve and stay in school at much higher rates. Efforts such as those in NYC can effectively raise students' attendance rates and lower the chronic absence rates of schools, putting more students on the path to high school graduation and greater career and lifelong opportunities. They also enable students to benefit more deeply for on-going school improvement efforts, including the introduction of the Common Core. Simply put, the students are in school more often to experience the improvements. As a result, reducing chronic absenteeism and improving student attendance also serve larger social goals of equity and equal opportunity, as low-income, minority students and special education students are both more likely to be chronically absent and benefit the most from school improvements.

The initial results also show that work remains to be done. Chronic absenteeism was significantly and meaningfully reduced, and attendance of students with histories of chronic absenteeism who received support from Success Mentors significantly increased, in the participating schools. Despite these improvements, however, chronic absenteeism levels still remain too high in the participating schools, indicating that the strategies and tools deployed by the interagency task force, while effective, are not reaching all the students who need them. As noted in the report, the level of chronic absenteeism in high-poverty schools can be staggering, and, in many grades, more common than solid or good attendance. Thus, even when it organized one of the largest school-based mentoring efforts in the nation, the task force was able to provide Success Mentors for less than half of the students who had histories of chronic absenteeism. This suggests that as the effort to combat chronic absenteeism in New York City and across the nation moves forward, even more aggressive school-, community-, and agency-based efforts will be needed.

Overall, however, the success achieved by the task force clearly shows that chronic absenteeism is not a fact of life in high-poverty neighborhoods that needs to be accepted or that is outside the realm of an effective public response. **New York City has shown that cities can be organized to help students attend school regularly, and in doing so serves as a model and challenge to others.**

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Appendix 1

Table 6. Academic gains associated with improvements in NYC student attendance rates

	Exiting Chronic Absence Status	Chronically Absent Students who Improve Attendance by Two or More Weeks Equivalent	Becoming a Solid Attender (>=95%)
HS Credits Earned	+5.6	+2.8	+4.6
Cumulative HS GPA	+6.8	+2.2	+7.3
Odds of being Proficient or above in Math Grades 3-8	+70%	+32%	+61%
Odds of being Proficient or above in ELA Grades 3-8	+36%	+20%	+33%
Odds of being Below Proficient in Math Grades 3-8	-39%	-13%	-41%
Odds of being Below Proficient in ELA Grades 3-8	-16%	-10%*	-18%

* The impact of improving attendance by two or more weeks was statistically non-significant only on the odds of being below proficient in ELA. All other associations were statistically significant.

Trends in Cumulative GPA by Changes in Chronic Absentee Status from 2009-10 to 2011-12

GPA	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Exited CA in 2010-11 and remained out for 2011-12	74%	75%	76%
Entered into CA 2010-11 and remained in for 2011-12	71%	67%	66%
Exited CA in 2010-11 but re-entered for 2011-12	71%	72%	71%

Results from School-Level Interrupted Time-Series Models

The trend lines presented in the chart below are not raw numbers, as the statistical models control for several factors including cyclical/monthly differences in chronic absence rates, school size, and the percent of minority students. The trend lines presented here are for a high school with an average enrollment size for the sample of 146 schools and average proportions of minority students (619 students and 96% minority). Graphs for elementary and middle schools look similar.

Several basic points emerge:

- The percentage of chronically absent students is lowest in September at the start of the school year and increases slightly throughout the year, increasing by up to 4% from January through May and reaching a high point in June, 7-8% higher than at the start of the school year.
- While chronic absenteeism rates were higher in the 2010-11 school year, there were no overall trends upward or downward from 2009-10 to 2012-13.
- Within each school type, enrollment was also significantly related to chronic absentee rates, with larger schools sizes being associated with higher rates of chronic absenteeism.

Percent of Chronically Absent Students By Treatment Group
(September 2009 through February 2013)
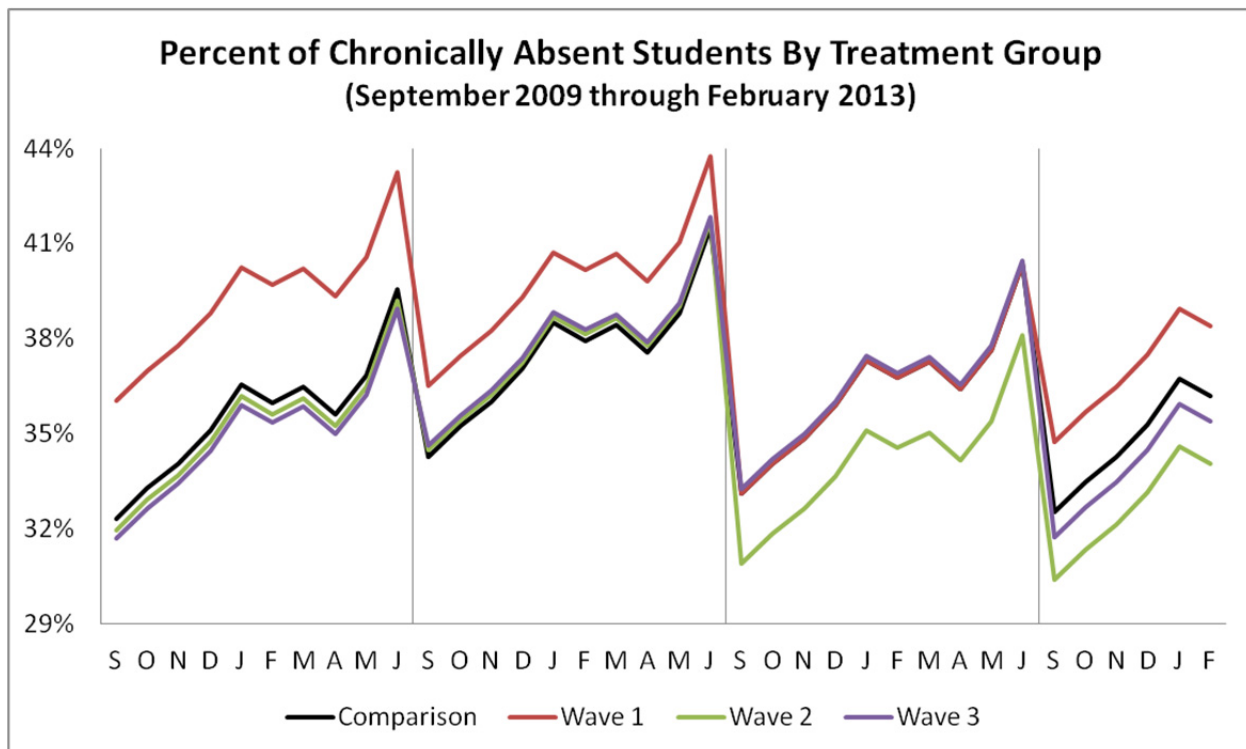
Appendix 2

Below you will find more comprehensive details on the elements of New York City's effort to combat chronic absenteeism. These details are provided for those seeking more detailed information about the program or who are looking to replicate it in their city.

Detailed Overview of NYC Interagency Task Force Efforts to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism and Improve School Attendance

Informed by a report from The New School (Strengthening School by Strengthening Families, 2008) that documented for the first time the extent of chronic absenteeism in New York City's schools and its pervasiveness in a subset of schools, Mayor Bloomberg organized an interagency task force, led by the mayor's office, in partnership with the Department of Education, to develop and implement a citywide effort to reduce chronic absenteeism. In early 2010, the task force undertook an intensive due diligence, planning, and organizational period; by the 2012-13 school year, the third full year of the campaign, 100 schools with more than 80,000 students were participating in the effort. For evaluation purposes, 46 other NYC schools that had similar ranges of chronically absent, free/reduced-lunch program eligible and limited-English-proficiency students were used for comparison.

Many of the core components of the task force's efforts were established during the planning period, though many others emerged during the program's implementation as the task force engaged in a continuous process of evaluation, learning, and refinement of its efforts. The most central elements of the effort, detailed through interviews with key participants as well as review of the effort's published materials, are:

Interagency Effort Led by the Mayor's Office

The chronic absenteeism campaign is an interagency effort, spearheaded by Mayor Bloomberg —a structure that has provided a shared sense of urgency around this issue, convening power and broad, multi-sector support. Given the varied and complex reasons for chronic absenteeism, having a comprehensive strategy that incorporates the "village" of city agencies, public-private partnerships, and community partners is critical. In NYC, that includes all relevant city agencies that intersect with youth and families, including: DOE, the Child Welfare Agency, Homeless Services, the Department of Youth Development, the NYPD, the Housing Authority, the Department of Health, the Department for the Aging, and NYC Service. Having a strong infrastructure and accountability systems led by the mayor's office is also a critical part of the task force's efforts. A few key components include:

- **Mayor/School System Team**: To ensure that the collaboration between the school system and the mayor's office is strong, the task force team, which includes representatives from the mayor's office, the school system, and technical assistance providers, meets biweekly to assess new data and operations, make course corrections, or expand best practices in real time.

- **Technical Advisor (TA) Site Visits & Boost Visits:** This is a vital part of the task force implementation efforts; it allows it to identify and explore disconnects in the field in real time, and helps schools to feel like they are being supported and "heard." A technical assistance team from the Children's Aid Society conducts site visits to new pilot schools within the first 12 or so weeks of school to ensure all schools are off to a strong start. Technical assistance visits are then scheduled for low-performing schools based on data reviews, or upon a school's request. The TA coordinator attends and reports at all task force bi-weekly meetings, and has a template for its report to the task force on key school performance metrics. In the third year of the effort, when it expanded to 100 schools from 50 the previous year, the task force also worked with the National Mentoring Partnership to provide training and electronic support via text messages and e-mail to Success Mentors, in particular those from internal school teams.

- **Monthly CBO Supervisor Meetings & Data Review**: To ensure that dissemination of communications, materials and best practices is being carried out at the school level, the task force and school system staff meet monthly with the community partners and organizations providing Success Mentors for each of the pilot schools. This meeting developed from a major disconnect the task force encountered in year one: critical best practice information and materials given to the school leadership were not making their way down to mentors or community partners. The cure was a *bottom up and top down strategy* for disseminating and receiving information, making possible a real time response.

- **Principal Leadership Retreats**: All the principals in pilot schools come together twice a year for a Principals' Leadership Summit (initially at the mayor's official home, and later elsewhere, when the group became too large) for training, program development, data review, and morale building. Additional retreats were held with other key partners and stakeholders to explain the initiative and explore relevant operational details.

Data: Measure, Monitor, Act

A central mission of the task force has been to encourage schools and their partners to use student and school data as critical organizing and management tools: specifically, to analyze data to identify chronically absent students, patterns and trends; provide "early warnings"; and track outcomes. This stands in marked contrast to the typical focus in schools on average daily attendance, often viewed as a compliance-driven metric that seldom generated much inquiry

or reflection. This frequently occurs because average daily attendance (ADA) may deliver a false message that a school does not have any attendance challenges. This happens because schools with ADA of 90 percent and above are not inclined to consider that underneath this global measure could be a significant number of students—one-fifth or more of their enrollment— who are not attending school on a regular basis. Thus, the first critical step in the task force's efforts was to standardize access to data by key partners and stakeholders, creating an infrastructure and culture that put measuring, monitoring, and acting upon chronic absenteeism data at the center of everyone's efforts.

- **Data-Sharing Agreements**: In year one, confidentiality agreements were negotiated and operationalized. Community-based school partners and Success Mentors now sign first-ever confidentiality agreements that give them access to student data and school-wide data. Another new data-sharing agreement provided data access between DOE and the Department of Homeless Services to support students in shelters. These agreements enabled the development of various data tools mentioned below.

- **Early Warning Data Tools**: Pilot schools receive lists of students who were chronically absent the prior year as well as aggregate "early warning" lists of students who have missed 5 days or more, or 10 days or more, during the current school year. In addition, the system-wide database (ATS) now flags students who have missed 10% or more of the school year.

- **Aggregate Data & Patterns for School-wide and Student Interventions**: Pilot schools receive training for how to use aggregate data and patterns to help them identify trends around chronic absenteeism for more effective and efficient interventions (i.e., spikes before certain holidays, in certain homerooms, grades, etc.). The task force quickly discovered that effective use of aggregate data by schools is important not only for strategic interventions, but to prevent principals and school leadership teams from feeling overwhelmed by the magnitude of the issue.

- **Electronic Data Dashboard**: During the due diligence phase of the task force's work, it learned that the extensive attendance and performance data available to schools was often not used because it was too complicated or confusing. To address that challenge, the task force worked with DOE to develop a user-friendly Student Success Data Dashboard to provide mentors, school-linked CBO partners, and other school personnel with a real-time look at a student's performance in the three key "ABC" areas: Attendance, Behavior and Coursework. The dashboard also displays prior interventions and supports.

- **Data Training & Field Visits**: School leadership receive data training by a task force-DOE team early in the year—with a core "macro" theme being how data can be a key management tool for better outcomes. The task force technical assistance provider also reviews the school's use of data as part of the regular school visit; this has proven to be a useful practice, and many schools request further TA site visits to help with their use of data.

- **Accountability — "What Gets Measured, Gets Done":** All schools know that student and school data on chronic absenteeism are regularly reviewed and shared by the task force; the data are also used in connection with the Success Mentors and their supervisors/community partners at each school. For example, at monthly City Hall mentor supervisors' meetings, school-level data is periodically distributed and reviewed by all to identify best and worst practices in real time, and to ensure a sustained focus on this objective. School data are distributed to schools at Principal Summits, and at the task force TA visits. Charts are typically displayed with simple green or red numbers to clearly indicate improved or below benchmark performance.

Based on its review of the causes of chronic absenteeism and existing effective practices to combat it, the task force soon concluded that the intervention work at the center of the effort had to be in the schools with the highest levels of chronic absenteeism and center around direct outreach to, and problem-solving with, chronically absent students and their families. For this to be effective and become institutionalized, the task force also concluded that principals had to spearhead and be at the center of efforts to combat chronic absenteeism.

- **Weekly Principal-Led "Student Success Meetings"**: For each task force pilot school, the principal had to agree to personally lead a weekly meeting that included the key stakeholders at the school, including: representatives from each school-linked community-based partner, school leadership (guidance counselor, parent coordinator, etc.), and the Success Mentors Team Leader (and possibly others, at the principal's discretion). The purpose of the meeting is to collaboratively review aggregate data, early warning lists, and selected student data to identify patterns of chronic absenteeism and collaboratively act upon them. This meeting also serves to bring school partners together, many of whom had worked in the same school for years and never met. This weekly meeting is the driving component of the task force infrastructure; the principal trainings and technical assistance visits address how to make this action-oriented meeting most effective.

One veteran principal vividly expressed a common reaction of initially being annoyed that she had to hold yet another weekly meeting, but then making it a core part of her school improvement strategy: "It brought my school together for my students; it taught us how to look at data collaboratively, how to rethink attendance and chronic absenteeism; and it reminded me how many resources I actually had in my building that I wasn't fully using."

- **Incentives & Positive Recognition for Good and Improved Attendance:** Participating schools were encouraged, and received tools and supports, to recognize good and improved attendance regularly, and to send out a consistent message: that it was important for students to be in school every day, that absences are noticed, and that students were welcomed and wanted in school every day. In addition, the goal was to also move the school to a point where every student absence got a rapid response. Schools were urged to hold assemblies, give certificates, or publicly recognize students with improved outcomes; thousands of "Good News" postcards were also distributed

for school staff, community organizations and mentors to send home to celebrate small successes. Schools also received free tickets and perks from corporate partners such as the NY Yankees, Starbucks and Macy's, to be strategically used as incentives to reward success, as well as lists of "home-grown" freebie incentives that could be used.

Schools as organizing hubs for community and social service supports

The task force recognized that there was often a disconnect between city agencies providing social services and the people who need them. In addition, city social service agencies did not always have ready access to data on the attendance of students under their care. As a result, concerted efforts were made to strengthen the participating schools' ability to serve as organizing hubs for community and agency social service supports.

- **Connecting Interagency and Community-Based Resources to Schools.** The task force focused on creating systems to better connect existing local resources and preventive service providers to schools, including tutors, mental health partners, libraries, asthma workshops, teen pregnancy clinics and more. Schools were also trained in how to better leverage community-based organizations (CBOs) with whom they had an existing partnership in their efforts to combat chronic absenteeism. The task force also worked to establish school-based meetings for parents and students where they could learn about the support resources provided by other city agencies.

- **Intense Focus on Students Living in Temporary Shelters (i.e. Homeless):** The Department of Education partnered with the Department of Homeless Services and 15 homeless family shelters, providing shelter staff with access to student and school data which contributed to a doubling of shelter placements within school districts, enabling students to remain at their school of origin; first-ever access to student attendance data so attendance could be monitored and improved; and training in how to improve attendance. Data on attendance rates was added to monthly shelter performance reports and year-end progress reports; Student Success Summits for families were held at the shelters; and homework centers were created at pilot shelters.

As a high level official from the Department of Homeless Services said, "This effort has transformed the culture at our shelters by making school attendance and performance a priority… Having access to school data for students at our shelters, working directly with DOE through the task force, and knowing that school attendance is a measured metric have made all shelter directors focus more on ensuring that our students go to school every day and reach their potential. It seems like common sense, but until now we just didn't have the tools, data or knowledge to do it."

NYC Success Mentor Corps: Mobilizing Citizen Service for Direct Outreach to Chronically Absent Students and their Families

The task force also quickly realized that additional person power would need to be mobilized to enable direct person-to-person outreach to chronically absent students and their families: to stress the importance of regular school attendance, to welcome students to school on a regular basis, and to solve the issues and remove the barriers preventing regular school attendance. The task force further realized to be both scalable and sustainable the person power would need to be found by reorganizing existing internal personnel, and reassigning existing external non-profit partners. To address these needs, the task force piloted and continually refined The NYC Success Mentor Corps. Within three years it became the largest, most comprehensive in-school mentoring effort in the nation, currently reaching almost 10,000 chronically absent or at-risk-of-becoming-chronically-absent students. It is a research-based, data-driven model using "early warning" technology tools and data-sharing agreements to improve attendance, and ultimately educational outcomes, for students in low-income and other communities.

What Success Mentors Do:

The following are the core elements of the Success Mentor Corp. Some of the below elements vary slightly depending on the type of Success Mentor model (e.g., specific time allocations).

- o Success Mentors are assigned to their mentees early in the school year, are required to work the full year, and must be at school a minimum of 3 days/15 hours per week.

- o Twenty percent of their time is focused on whole-school attendance and culture efforts; the rest of the time is spent working with their mentees.

- o Success Mentors greet students in school in the mornings and call home with a positive message if the mentee is not in school.

- o They meet one-on-one and in groups during the week.

- o They are encouraged from week 1 to identify a student's strengths and celebrate them.

- o They also attempt to identify the underlying causes of absenteeism, work with the student to solve those issues within their capacity, and where necessary, work with the school partners to connect the student and family to local supports to address more significant underlying problems.

- o Success Mentor model differs from other mentoring models in a number of ways, including:

- *Metric mentoring:* Mentors get direct access to student mentee data through a user friendly data dashboard and receive training in how to use the data to drive stronger outcomes; mentee outcome metrics are measured throughout the year.

- *Student matches at start of school year:* Mentors are assigned specific chronically absent students at the beginning of the school year, based on data from the prior year, and are given specific outcome goals which include improving school attendance.

- *Rigorous support infrastructure:* Mentors are supported with a rigorous infrastructure that is both bottom up and top down, which includes: summer and midyear training summits; regular group phone check-ins with the mentor technical assistant; mobile phone "tips" throughout the year; impact evaluations from data analysis; monthly city hall roundtable meetings with mentor supervisors and task force team to identify problems and best practices in real time.

- *Direct access to school leadership:* Mentors are given school leadership level position, with a guaranteed "seat at the table" at the principal's weekly Student Success Meetings.

- *Access to interagency resources:* Mentors receive training from interagency partners and have access to interagency resources brought to schools.

- *Mentor morale to drive strong outcomes:* Much effort is made throughout the year to keep the Success Mentors (and their supervisors) motivated and inspired (e.g., personally signed thank-you letters from the Mayor, small incentives to use with their students, gym membership discounts through a corporate partner in year 1, and monthly conference call check-ins.

- *Three Success Mentors Models:* Over the three years of the initiative the task force has developed three Success Mentor models; all share core components but differ primarily in the pool of mentors they draw on:

  - *External community partners* (national service corps members, e.g. City Year, Experience Corps, social work students, retired professionals, etc.)

  - *Internal school staff (*teachers during service periods, administrators, coaches, non-teaching staff, etc.)

- *Peer-to-Peer* (11th- and 12th- graders supporting 9th-graders through an integrated school program where senior peer leaders are part of a leadership training course all year and receive school credit).

  - *Model embraced by schools and students:* The Success Mentor model has been enthusiastically embraced by school staff, students, and parents. The Department of Education reports that principals regularly ask for additional mentors for their schools, and a middle school principal stated that students were coming up to her saying "I want one of those," pointing to a Success Mentor. Survey results of both principals and mentors indicate that the program is highly regarded and embraced. A mid-year survey conducted by the task force in 2011-12 found that 95% of all mentors enjoyed being a Success Mentor.

Getting the Message Out: Promoting Awareness about Chronic Absenteeism

The task force's outreach and due diligence confirmed that knowledge about the dangers of chronic absenteeism was limited – among educators, students and parents alike. Few benchmarks existed for parents or educators to know when students were at risk of being chronically absent. To heighten awareness about the costs of chronic absenteeism, the task force launched two campaigns:

- The Ad Council "It's 9 AM, Do You Know Where Your Children Are?" campaign warns parents, "If your kids have missed 20 or more days of school, there's a good chance they won't graduate." The campaign also includes a first-ever NYC Electronic Truancy & Absenteeism Help Center, where parents can text a number or call 311 to find out how to "get help." Through the Help Center, parents can find out how many days of school their child has missed, and find free resources in the community for support. Ads are displayed at bus and subway stations/kiosks and are on 5 million NYC metro cards, and posters were distributed to schools, community organizations, and small businesses in targeted areas. To date, there have been several thousand visits to the help center.

- WakeUp! NYC is a multi-media celebrity wake-up call campaign with inspirational morning messages from celebrities such as Magic Johnson, the NY Yankees, John Legend and Whoopi Goldberg. More than 30,000 students have signed up to get a morning call. In a telephone survey of randomly selected users last year, approximately 80% of parents surveyed said that the WakeUp calls helped them get their kids to school on time more frequently.

- In addition, the task force does much to educate principals about the basic facts around chronic absenteeism. The task force learned that even among seasoned principals there is an assumption that attendance is largely about compliance, rather than improving performance outcomes. Many were unaware of the level of chronic absenteeism at their schools because it was not a performance metric, so they did not have ready access to data about their individual school's level of chronic absenteeism. Site visits to schools always include a presentation on the association between chronic absenteeism, test scores, graduation rates, and juvenile crime.

"I am really, really proud this year at school, and I like it more now that I'm there all the time. I used to be out a lot, I missed 29 days last year – but only 3 so far this year - and no more. My success mentor is the reason I will never miss school. She greets me every day, comes to my room and says good morning to me. She helped me and my family learn that I had to come every day. And she helped us solve a big problem at home so I could get to school every day."

5th grade mentee at Task Force pilot school

"The school really helped us understand that my son had to be in school every day, no matter what. I have a chronically ill child, and it's really hard – my son just sort of got lost. So he just didn't get to school. The school gave him a mentor who made him want to come every day, and made me do my best to get him there. The mentor helped us figure out how to solve the problem keeping him from school. He loves school now, his attendance is great and his grades are better too. I really thank the school for what they did."

Parent in Task Force pilot school, Partnered with Success Mentor to improve son's attendance and performance

"I have been a teacher for 18 years, but I have helped my students this year as a success mentor in ways I could never have fathomed. The [Task Force) program allowed me to understand why the students weren't coming to school, and let me reverse those patterns in lots of cases. I was able to reach out to parents, get their trust, and let them know why missing school was hurting their kids. I saw kids improve their attendance, and then their grades. Attendance and school performance go hand-in-hand. Letting parents know that helps."

Internal Success Mentor (teacher) at Task Force pilot school