

DIPLOMAS NOW EARLY IMPACT FINDINGS NEW EVIDENCE ON REDUCING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Randomized field trial shows chronic absenteeism reduced in first year of middle school by 17 percent in Diplomas Now schools.

New evidence supports My Brother's Keeper Success Mentor Initiative for reducing chronic absenteeism.

Diplomas Now combines evidence-based whole school reform strategies with enhanced student supports guided by an early warning system. It integrates the efforts and insights of teachers and school leaders with supports from Talent Development Secondary, City Year, and Communities In Schools. It is designed to work in high-poverty areas with the nation's most-challenged middle and high schools. Winner of an I3 validation grant, Diplomas Now is in the midst of a seven-year randomized field trial. An early impact report by MDRC was released in June 2016, with significant findings on reducing chronic absenteeism.

KEY FINDING

In middle schools, Diplomas Now reduced chronic absenteeism in the sixth grade by an average of 17 percent.

Why This Matters

The first-ever national report of chronic absenteeism in June 2016 shows more than 6 million students, or 13 percent, missing nearly a month or more of schooling. These rates are higher among low-income and minority students.

Chronic absenteeism leads to a decrease in student achievement and an increase in the likelihood of dropping out and becoming involved in the juvenile justice system.

This finding validates the multi-tiered approach to chronic absenteeism highlighted at the federal interagency Every Student Every Day Summit to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in June.

It builds further evidence for the Obama Administration's My Brother's Keeper Success Mentor Initiative, which is modeled on Diplomas Now. The initiative to reduce chronic absenteeism is being expanded to 30 high-poverty districts across the United States.

To learn more, visit www.diplomasnow.org or contact us at info@diplomasnow.org



DIPLOMAS NOW

KEY FINDING

In high-poverty environments, substantial numbers of students who leave elementary school with strong academic skills become chronically absent during the first year of middle school. Across 30 high poverty middle schools nearly 20 percent of students who were academically proficient in 5th grade became chronically absent in 6th grade, and nearly 1/3 develop an early warning indicator.

Why This Matters

Academic success in elementary school does not inoculate students against the forces of poverty that keep students out of school. To overcome those forces and keep students in school, there is a need for comprehensive school reform efforts that both improve teaching and learning, and give students the support they need to attend school regularly so they can benefit from the good teaching, challenging curricula and strong instructional programs available to them.

Now we have the empirical evidence on how this can be done.

HOW DIPLOMAS NOW REDUCES CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

The Diplomas Now model employs a **four-part, multi-tiered approach to reducing chronic absenteeism**:

- 1) **SCHOOLWIDE EFFORTS** create a positive school culture that supports and celebrates regular school attendance for all students and makes school a place where students want to be and where they feel welcomed and supported.
- 2) **EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS** provide a means to monitor student absenteeism weekly -- in meetings that involve school administrators, teams of teachers who share common groups of students, student support personnel, City Year AmeriCorps members, a Communities In Schools site coordinator, and a Talent Development Secondary school transformation facilitator who initially helps organize the meetings, analyze the data, and coordinate follow-up. Adults pool their knowledge to create a 360-degree view of each student and design interventions based on this view. Students are assigned champions who monitor their progress toward attendance goals every two weeks. If students don't make progress, the adults work out new interventions.
- 3) **SUCCESS MENTORS** are assigned to students who enter sixth grade with a history of chronic absenteeism or trend toward it during the year. These students are assigned the support of a City Year AmeriCorps member who responds to every absence, makes students feel welcome in school every day, and provides mentoring, academic and socio-emotional skill-building supports, and near-peer role modeling. CY corps members work with their students four days a week, throughout the year.
- 4) **INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORTS ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS** who disclose or are known to be chronically absent because of significant out-of-school challenges, such as sibling or elder care responsibilities, substance abuse or mental health challenges at home, and homelessness. Communities In Schools site coordinators work to provide these students with integrated and case managed supports to insure they receive the professional and youth service agency assistance they need to attend school every day.

This brief was written by Dr. Robert Balfanz, Co-Founder of Diplomas Now and Director of the Everyone Graduates Center Johns Hopkins University School of Education.

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