

New study examines the impact of snow days on student performance

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“With slack time in the schedule, the time lost to [weather-related] closure can be regained,” says Joshua S. Goodman, assistant professor of public policy at HKS. Stephanie Mitchell/Harvard Staff Photographer

School administrators may want to be even more aggressive in calling for weather-related closures. A new study conducted by Harvard Kennedy School Assistant Professor Joshua Goodman finds that snow days do not impact student learning. In fact, he finds, keeping schools open during a storm is more detrimental to learning than a closure.

The findings are "consistent with a model in which the central challenge of teaching is coordination of students," Goodman writes. "With slack time in the schedule, the time lost to closure can be regained. Student absences, however, force teachers to expend time getting students on the same page as their classmates."

Goodman, a former [school teacher](#), began his study at the behest of the Massachusetts Department of Education, which wanted to know more about the impact of snow days on [student](#) achievement. He examined reams of data in grades three through 10 from 2003 to 2010. One conclusion—that snow days are less detrimental to student performance than other absences—can be explained by the fact that [school](#) districts typically plan for weather-related disruptions and tack on extra days in the schedule to compensate. They do not, however, typically schedule make-up days for other student absences.

The lesson for administrators might be considered somewhat counterintuitive. "They need to consider the downside when deciding not to declare a snow day during a storm—the fact that many kids will miss school regardless, either because of transportation issues or parental discretion. And because those absences typically aren't made up in the school calendar, those kids can fall behind."

Goodman, an assistant professor of public policy, teaches empirical methods and the economics of education. His research interests include labor and public economics, with a particular focus on education policy.

More information: Read the paper here:
www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/jgoodma.../papers/snowdays.pdf

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