

Programs to reduce absenteeism more successful for youth with more absences

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Students who are chronically absent from school often perform poorly academically, and are more likely to be delinquent, drop out, or engage in other high-risk behaviors. New research identified a common way to define absenteeism and classified youth's absenteeism based on degree. The study found that interventions for youth with the highest rates of absenteeism were more successful than those for youth with fewer absences.

Conducted by researchers at the University of Nebraska, the study appears in *Justice Evaluation Journal*, a publication of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.

"It's been difficult to evaluate programs that aim to reduce absenteeism since there are so many differences in how absenteeism is measured," explains Anne Hobbs, director of the Juvenile Justice Institute at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, and the study's lead author. "We identified a common way to define absenteeism across programs and then evaluated programs that address a range of absence levels. This can help us determine when to intervene, how to respond, and to whom interventions should be directed."

As part of a statewide evaluation in Nebraska to assess the effectiveness of programs in reducing absenteeism, the study looked at 12 programs in 137 schools and involved 1,606 children and adolescents. Youth in the study ranged from 5 to 18 years old and were from a range of races and ethnicities, though the majority of students were White.

Researchers defined absenteeism as all types of absences (not just truancy), categorized it into eight types, and classified absences as both excused and unexcused. They established a common measurement system and common definitions for each type of absence statewide. The researchers also created a common data entry system that each program could access, mapped attendance codes to each category of absence, and provided programs with technical assistance on using the new system.

Youth were grouped into tiers based on their rates of absenteeism: Youth in Tier 1A missed less than 5% of required [school](#), those in Tier 1B missed 6-10%, those in Tier 2 missed 11-19%, and those in Tier 3 missed 20% or more. With the data gathered using this approach, the study evaluated programs that served a range of [youth](#) spanning early intervention to those involved with the courts. It also examined whether classifying youth (by tier) explained improvements in attendance, taking into account age, race, gender, school, and program.

For youth who took part in programs to reduce absenteeism, the study found that youth with the highest rates of absenteeism—both excused and unexcused—had the most improvements in reducing absenteeism, while youth with fewer absences did not improve significantly. The school the youth attended also played a role, though it wasn't clear what school characteristic—size, way of handling absences, or climate—had the most impact.

The study also found that Black youth, American Indian youth, youth classified as Other, and older youth were significantly more likely to be classified in Tier 3 (that is, missing 20% or more of required school) than in other tiers; White and Hispanic youth were distributed more evenly across the tiers. In addition, males were more likely to be referred to intervention programs earlier (at Tier 1) than females.

"Using common measurements for [absenteeism](#) and common definitions

makes it easier to compare attendance patterns and the success of programs within different schools, school districts, and states where measurement of attendance may vary," suggests Lindsey Wylie, research coordinator at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, who coauthored the study.

Provided by Crime and Justice Research Alliance

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