

CENTER FOR NEW YORK CITY AFFAIRS  
THE NEW SCHOOL

# Strengthening Schools by Strengthening Families

Community Strategies to Reverse  
Chronic Absenteeism in the Early  
Grades and Improve Supports for  
Children and Families

*by* KIM NAUER, ANDREW WHITE AND RAJEEV YERNENI

CENTER FOR NEW YORK CITY AFFAIRS  
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# Strengthening Schools by Strengthening Families

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## Executive Summary

The years spent in primary school are especially important to children's long-term educational success. Yet tens of thousands of young New York City children carry the difficulties of their home lives into the classroom, where they intrude on a child's ability to learn and thrive.

For many children, problems at home prevent them from attending school regularly. The analysis presented in this report finds that chronic absenteeism in New York City begins in the earliest grades and is far more serious than has previously been reported. Our research found that more than 90,000 children in grades K through 5—or 20 percent of total enrollment—missed at least a month of school during the 2007–08 school year.

There are many reasons for high rates of chronic early-grade absenteeism: health issues such as asthma, transportation problems (particularly for children with disabilities), and dislocations caused by eviction or traveling between homeless shelters. There are issues of family instability, such as a mother's depression or illness. Absences are also associated with cultural issues such as language barriers, and with problematic family priorities, including extended family vacations during the school year. The schools themselves bear a responsibility for attendance, both in their attention to the issue and in their efforts to create welcoming places where children want to be and that parents respect and value.

Addressing these issues directly, alongside absenteeism, may not only improve school success in the long-term, but also strengthen families and improve the quality of many children's lives.

With this in mind, the Bloomberg administration has coordinated efforts to bridge social services and education. Officials in the mayor's office have sought to share resources and information across city-run systems and bureaucracies. The city's Department of Education has developed management tools that track attendance data and alert school staff when children are absent for extended periods of time. The department has also instituted a school support structure that can help school principals leverage resources from other community institutions and government-funded services, including after-school programs, mental health care and much more.

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Even so, in many neighborhoods, the challenges of child and family poverty are immense, and problems in school overlap directly with problems at home.

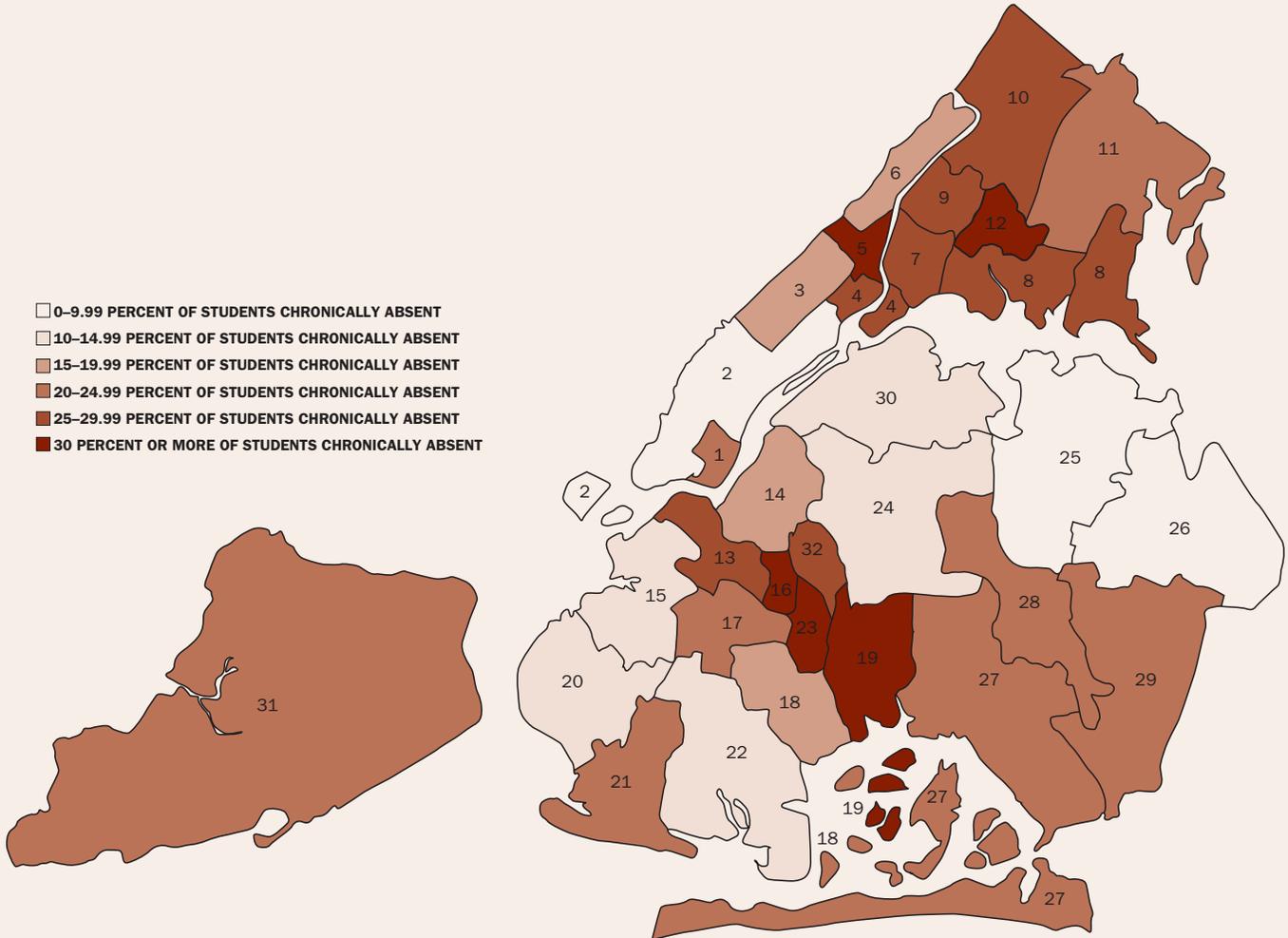
Consider as one example the relationship with child welfare: Each year, roughly seven of every 100 children in New York City come into direct contact with the child welfare system, either through child protective investigations, preventive family support services or foster care placements.<sup>1</sup> This rate of involvement more than doubles in the city's low-income communities, which generate the vast majority of child protective investigations and foster care placements. The majority of these children are school-age boys and girls.

The large majority of these children also come from those city neighborhoods where they are most likely to live in poverty.

### ELEMENTARY CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM WIDESPREAD THROUGHOUT NYC

This map illustrates that chronic absenteeism is a problem in elementary schools throughout the city, but is particularly high in low-income areas like the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn. See the chart on page 16 for full details, by district.

### LEVELS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM BY DISTRICT



**SOURCE:** Department of Education, ATS school-level data on individual student absences, SY 2007–08. Includes all schools designated as elementary schools by the DOE, which includes both elementary schools and elementary-junior high schools. Charter schools were excluded. Districts 75 and 79 were excluded.

Not surprisingly, these are the same districts with the greatest levels of chronic absenteeism in the early grades. And these problems are substantial. According to our analysis of city schools' attendance data:

- Last year, in 12 of New York City's 32 school districts, well over 25 percent of primary school children were chronically absent from school, missing more than 10 percent of the school year.
- In five of these districts, fully 30 percent of primary school children, kindergarten through fifth grade, were chronically absent.
- In six of these districts, between 8 and 11 percent of primary school children missed 38 or more days of school during the 2007/2008 school year.
- And in 123 individual New York City primary schools, at least 30 percent of the children were chronically absent.

Notably, not every school in these districts has this problem. Some have learned how to reduce absenteeism. Others work with community-based organizations to reach out to families, to find resources to help them, or to seek intervention when problems are dire.

This research project began as an effort to determine whether community organizations and the city's public schools could work together to ease the burden on the city's child welfare system, which was swamped by reports of suspected abuse or neglect after the much publicized murder of Nixzmary Brown in early 2006. New York City experienced a 25 percent increase in reports of abuse and neglect from 2005 to 2007. By far the most substantial increase came from educational personnel. Today, reports from schools continue to come in at a historically rapid pace.

Many of these reports are filed because of excessive absenteeism in the early grades, which can be defined by authorities as "educational neglect."

We soon learned of research currently underway in other U.S. cities that reveals associations between early-grade chronic absenteeism and poverty, on the one hand, and children's poor educational achievement on the other. With this knowledge, we decided to assess the degree of chronic absenteeism in the early grades in New York City—and to explore effective school- and community-based counter strategies that might benefit families while improving attendance.

We wanted to see if efforts to build close working relationships between community-based organizations and schools might serve a dual purpose: stronger families and higher levels of student achievement in the schools.

We found notable efforts in various neighborhoods, ranging from the all-inclusive "community schools," with a wide range of social services, to more targeted programs that offer roving social workers to assist with behavior issues or family problems. Some of these efforts are designed to address absenteeism directly, while others are geared more toward providing mental health care or some other type of family support that can prevent a severe family crisis.

Strong research has found that chronic absenteeism among primary school children is often associated with "poverty, teenage motherhood, single motherhood, low maternal education, welfare, maternal unemployment, food insecurity, poor maternal health and multiple siblings."<sup>2</sup> The authors of a recent study, Hedy Chang and Marajósé Romero, found that rates of chronic absenteeism "jumped significantly once families were confronted with three or more risks . . . Multiple risks were most commonly found among children living in poverty, from a racial/ethnic minority group or in poor health."

In the following pages, we provide data on the full extent of early-grade chronic absenteeism in New York and identify the neighborhoods and schools most affected. We also provide data on chronic absenteeism in middle schools: In 96 of the city's 366 middle schools, more than 30 percent of

*In many neighborhoods, the challenges of child and family poverty are immense, and problems in school overlap directly with problems at home.*

<sup>1</sup> This is a conservative estimate based on the number of children interacting with child protective services, preventive services and foster care, and accounts for the duplication of the substantial number of children who interact with more than one of these systems.

<sup>2</sup> Chang and Romero, "Present, Engaged and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades," National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, September 2008. Page 14.

children were chronically absent during the 2007–08 school year. In 27 schools, more than 40 percent were chronically absent .

Researchers and child protection professionals have found that chronic early absenteeism is at times a signal of much more serious problems in a family, such as domestic violence, child abuse, mental illness and criminal justice system involvement, all commonly associated with child welfare involvement. This report also examines the role of schools in the child welfare system, including:

- the training and reporting mechanisms that are the formal links between child protective services and the Department of Education; and
- the huge variation that exists across the school system for outreach to parents whose children are missing school or who may be struggling with poverty, health issues and other high-risk factors.

This report provides data on school-based attendance “407” alerts, which are generated automatically to inform school leaders when a child has crossed a threshold of absenteeism, and which require action to determine the reasons for these absences. Our data show that schools are attending to the types of extended absences that trigger these alerts more quickly today than in years past. However, the data also show that the structure of the 407 system masks the full extent of chronic absenteeism, especially in the early grades.

We offer case studies of community-based organizations and schools that have worked to engage families, to offer them support, and to identify just what their students and families need.

Finally, we have synthesized workable ideas from school principals, attendance teachers, social workers and city officials. These recommendations, on page 5, offer direction from the field in addressing the intertwined problems discussed in this report. We suggest an approach for targeting schools with the greatest need, including a possible structure for supporting practical assessments of the problem, followed by effective working partnerships between principals and skilled community-based organizations.

This project is far from complete. We do not yet have conclusive evidence that a wide-ranging strategy to establish closer relationships between community organizations and schools will both strengthen families and improve student achievement. Such a strategy has not yet been pursued in New York with these dual objectives in mind.

We do know, however, that chronic absenteeism in elementary schools is disproportionately a problem in poor and minority communities and it immediately puts students behind their middle class peers. The academic pressures build over time—and build quickly. While the reasons behind absenteeism and related issues of child welfare are extremely complex, dedicated principals in New York City have proven that this is a problem that can be addressed with careful attention to underlying causes. New York can learn from them, and build a more formidable structure for strengthening schools by strengthening families. ❖

*This report provides data on the full extent of chronic absenteeism and identifies the neighborhoods and schools most affected.*

# Lessons and Recommendations from the Field

City leaders have pressed hard to improve academic achievement in the public school system and to give children—particularly children living in poverty—a better chance in life. The Bloomberg administration’s massive investment in public education includes a \$5.3 billion increase in annual school spending since 2002. Test scores and graduation rates have improved, but even Schools Chancellor Joel Klein acknowledges the schools still have a long way to go.

This report suggests a new focus on improving school achievement by strengthening families and neighborhoods. To do this, schools must tackle the issue of chronic absenteeism in the earliest grades—long before children are given their first standardized tests in the third grade.

Reducing chronic absenteeism is a huge challenge in neighborhoods where half or more of the families with children live in poverty. Many factors outside the schoolhouse—such as chronic health problems, unstable housing, or mental health issues in the family—undermine children’s ability to learn. Schools can and often do play an important role in addressing these problems.

Below, we synthesize some of the most important lessons we have learned from dozens of policy experts, government officials, teachers, principals and social workers who wrestle with these issues.

**LESSON 1: Good attendance is essential to academic achievement.** In the early grades, attendance is a strong predictor of long-term success. National research suggests that chronic absenteeism in the early grades sets the stage for school failure later on. Children who miss a large number of school days in kindergarten or first grade tend to have lower levels of academic achievement throughout their school careers. Sadly, there are high levels of chronic absenteeism in New York City elementary schools, particularly in low-income neighborhoods.

**LESSON 2: Attendance is given insufficient attention in the Department of Education’s progress reports.** The average daily attendance rate accounts for only 5 percent of a school’s grade on its annual progress report. Moreover, this average daily attendance rate can mask high rates of chronic absenteeism. A total of 75 schools with chronic absenteeism rates of more than 30 percent received an “A” or “B” on their latest school progress reports.

**LESSON 3: The causes of chronic absenteeism are complex and vary from school to school.** Some schools have high rates of asthma, or a large number of parents with health and mental health issues. Some schools have many parents who are undocumented immigrants and who are fearful of authorities. Other schools simply need a better way to contact parents when children are absent. Understanding the situation at each particular school is key to finding a solution.

**LESSON 4: Schools in high-poverty districts benefit from strong relationships with community-based organizations that provide parent outreach and assistance to families.** Family-oriented social services—ranging from help with housing and food to referrals for drug and alcohol treatment—provide a valuable complement to a school’s academic program and may help improve attendance. For example, teachers and guidance counselors may alert a community organization that a particular child is having trouble at home and needs extra attention. School mental health and guidance programs steer children with special needs into critical services. For other families, simply providing child care and after-school programs can relieve extreme stress. By establishing more trusting relationships with families, schools and community organizations can also help reinforce the importance of education.

With these lessons in mind, we make the following recommendations:

**RECOMMENDATION 1: Rates of chronic absenteeism should be one of the measures by which schools are judged in the city’s annual “school progress reports.”**

The current system, which places heavy emphasis on year-to-year improvement on standardized tests first given in third grade, fails to adequately account for the importance of attendance in the critical early years of school. Including rates of chronic absenteeism in the school progress reports would create an explicit incentive among school leaders to address the problem.

**RECOMMENDATION 2: The Department of Education should assign its attendance teachers to tighter geographic areas.** That way, they can get to know the territory, recognize unique problems, connect families with local services and spend less time traveling long distances from school to school and district to district.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: Schools should offer teachers and other staff more extensive training in how to deal with cases of suspected abuse or neglect.** At present, schools often report excessive absences to the State Central Register as “educational neglect.” Often, it would be preferable to collaborate with an outside organization to help engage families and organize community-based family support or other services. Teachers should also be more skilled at identifying other forms of neglect, so they know when and where to turn for help.

**RECOMMENDATION 4: The city should continue to pursue tighter coordination of existing services for children and families.** One potential benefit of mayoral control of the school system is better communication and coordination between the schools and other city services, such as the Administration for Children’s Services, the Health Department, the Human Resources Administration and the state’s Office of Mental Health.

**RECOMMENDATION 5: Identify 50 to 100 schools with high rates of chronic absenteeism in high-poverty districts, and establish executive-level partnerships with outside organizations to put solutions into action.**

“Community schools” are lauded nationwide as a method for integrating social services, health care and other supports into the public education system. They rely on formidable partnerships between public school principals and the leadership of community-based nonprofits, such as the Children’s Aid Society in New York. But the model is expensive and requires substantial square-footage for programs, a resource few principals are willing to give up. However, a key

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element of this model can be adapted to help coordinate a response to the problems faced by many schools.

Community schools employ a high-level specialist who works alongside the principal to manage social services and other outside programs and relationships for the school. This “community schools director” works for a reliable, trusted nonprofit partner and is responsible for developing and coordinating the school’s student and family service programs. These professionals typically have master’s degrees in social service or youth development and know the landscapes of the neighborhoods where they

work. They are capable of coordinating in-school programs, and of expanding them outward by vetting and working with groups and institutions outside of the school.

The Department of Education should require that each school in the target group assess the key factors behind the problem of chronic absenteeism. Principals should have access to outside technical assistance to perform this assessment, whether from the department’s own support offices or skilled nonprofit providers.

Following the assessment, a principal will have a clear understanding of the types of support required to address the problem. Ideally, the principal should be able to interview and select an appropriate partner organization from among several

stable, well-respected nonprofit organizations with different specializations, dozens of which exist in New York City. Once the partner is selected, a professional from the organization will be brought on board to work inside the school at the right hand of the principal—and alongside the school’s top administrators and program staff.

A school with crippling asthma problems, for example, might consider partnering with a community-minded hospital. Schools with large numbers of especially low-income families might look to a preventive family support provider. Those with major language barriers may seek a community-based organization with a trusted reputation among the area’s immigrant parents and leaders.

“Part of the problem is that schools often have 15 different programs in a building and no one is thinking about the coordination and integration between them. That’s the role that this director plays,” says the Children’s Aid Society’s Katherine Eckstein. The same can be said of the wider community: most neighborhoods have a number of social services, some of which are connected with the schools, some not. Across New York City, there are dozens of community-based nonprofits, funded through contracts with the Administration for Children’s Services and other city agencies—as well as with Medicaid and federal and private grants—who can reach out to and assist families. The goal is to make the most of opportunities that are already available. “We need to better coordinate the existing systems that are supporting children and families right now,” Eckstein says.

By installing a high level staff member from a carefully selected partner organization within the school leadership team, students, families and staff will benefit not only from targeted coordination with outside agencies and institutions, but also from expertise regarding existing funding streams and available services.

Having someone in school leadership available to tackle social services “would be a big advantage for schools,” says Varleton “Mac” McDonald, a former high school principal who now advises principals as an Empowerment Network team leader. He says the size of the job is likely too much to ask of current assistant principals, who already have big responsibilities, and of other student support staff, who may lack the expertise or drive.

A strategy that reduces chronic absenteeism and strengthens families in low-income communities conforms with the Bloomberg administration’s agenda of tighter school accountability and greater student success. It supports the mayor’s own substantial efforts to improve coordination of human services. And it fits with the work of the Administration for Children’s Services and the Center for Economic Opportunity, which have pursued more holistic and integrated social safety nets for children and adults alike. ❖

## A Hidden Problem

In New York City, one in five children misses at least a month of school each year—and in many neighborhoods the number is much higher. What can be done?

New York City's elementary schools have far more serious rates of absenteeism than have previously been reported. While city school officials have long been concerned by poor attendance rates in middle and high schools, an analysis by the Center for New York City Affairs has found that attendance problems begin with much younger students.

The center's analysis of Department of Education (DOE) data found that more than 20 percent of the city's elementary school pupils were chronically absent during the 2007–08 school year—that is, they missed at least 20 days of the 185-day school year. In districts serving poor neighborhoods, the numbers are even higher. In the south and central Bronx, in central Harlem, and in several neighborhoods in central Brooklyn, 30 percent or more of the pupils were chronically absent, according to the analysis. In contrast, only 5.2 percent of pupils were chronically absent in District 26, which serves the middle class neighborhood of Bayside, Queens.

The DOE generally reports the daily average attendance rate for each school. The citywide average for elementary schools in 2007–08 was 93 percent. But this average masks a serious trend: while some students have nearly perfect attendance, others miss school with alarming regularity. And, while the citywide numbers suggest attendance is reasonably high, a closer look shows very high rates of absenteeism clustered in a dozen poor neighborhoods. (See chart on page 16 for district-by-district details.)

The analysis by the Center for New York City affairs demonstrates that a school with, say, a 90 percent average attendance rate may have a very large number of kids who miss weeks or even months of school. That's because a different 10 percent of children may miss school each day—and for many, their absences add up.

The city tracks attendance through a massive central database fed by daily attendance reports from school staff. This system automatically alerts a school when a child has missed an exceedingly high number of days, typically 10 consecutive days or 20 days over a four-month period. School officials rely on these alerts—colloquially known as “407s” after the official “Form 407” they generate—to keep informed of potentially alarming disappearances, like that of Nixzmary Brown, who was absent for more than two weeks before being found dead in 2006. However, an analysis by the Center for New York City Affairs found that many more young children are chronically absent than the 407 numbers would suggest. (See chart, page 9.)

In sum, the two attendance numbers that the DOE tracks closely tend to mask the overall severity of the chronic attendance problem in New York City. And while principals are expected to keep track of their students and respond quickly to absences, the numbers show that many haven't been able to keep up with the problem. Of the 725 public schools serving elementary grades (excluding charter schools and schools serving severely disabled children), 165 have chronic absentee rates of 30 percent or more.

Top DOE officials do not dispute the numbers, but they point out, accurately, that overall attendance has been improving under Chancellor Joel Klein and that New York City has one of the most sophisticated attendance tracking systems in the country. Principals have access to a daily report that can instantly show them which students are chronically absent or in danger of becoming so. But the onus is on the principals to seek help if they feel they need it.

“I would really hope and expect that the principals know their kids,” says Elayna Konstan, head of the DOE's Office of School and Youth Development, which is charged with monitoring attendance. This is where the ultimate responsibility lies, adds JoEllen Lynch, a high ranking DOE official with extensive experience serving at-risk kids. “At the heart of it, it is at the school level.”

## IF TOO MANY ARE ABSENT, ALL SUFFER

The implications of chronic absences in elementary school are only beginning to be understood. Even in kindergarten and first grade, children with many absences miss critical academic work that puts them at risk for failure later in school, new research suggests. Moreover, their absences can affect the academic achievement of a whole school. Even students with good attendance suffer when teachers have to repeat material or divert their attention to give extra help to children who have been absent. “It’s a quiet problem that drives a lot of noisy problems,” says Robert Balfanz, a researcher at Johns Hopkins University and a leading expert on dropouts.

Recent academic research suggests that cumulative absences at a young age can quickly cascade into serious problems as students watch their classmates advance beyond them. The National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health has launched a project analyzing the causes and consequences of early chronic absenteeism. Using national data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Cohort at the National Center for Education Statistics, researchers concluded that one-quarter of all kindergarten children nationwide were either chronic absentees or at risk of becoming so.

Chronic absenteeism is disproportionately a problem in elementary schools that serve mostly poor black and Latino children. It contributes to the achievement gap between these children and their white and middle class peers. Students who have many absences in kindergarten are likely to have similar attendance problems in first grade. By the end of first grade, these children are already slipping behind in reading, math and general knowledge, the study notes.

The attendance effect is still small at this age, says Mariajosé Romero, an author of the report. But studies in other countries like England, where they track the academic progress of children over their school careers, show that stumbling even at an early age can cause problems that are hard to repair. “It’s a vicious cycle,” she says. “If kids don’t go to school, they miss out. Then have to catch up. It gets to a point where it’s hard to catch up and they are aware that they are not making as much progress as their peers. They feel uncomfortable, so they are more likely to refuse to go to school, present more problems, and then not want to go to school. It feeds into itself.”

By sixth grade, social scientists can predict with fair certainty which children will ultimately drop out. Balfanz and Ruth Curran Neild, both based at the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University, have been closely following cohorts of Philadelphia children since the 1990s. They discovered that poor attendance is among the foolproof early warning signals. A sixth grader who misses more than 20 percent of the school year has a 75 percent chance of quitting school some time before graduation. (See “Why Attendance Matters,” page 20.)

The reasons for chronic absenteeism are complex. In neighborhoods with high rates of asthma and poor access to health care, children may miss school because of chronic health problems. In neighborhoods with large numbers of immigrants, children sometimes return to their home country for extended vacations. Some parents who have low levels of education themselves simply don’t understand the importance of regular school attendance; others suffer from depression, or drug abuse. Children with unstable housing—who may sleep at a cousin’s apartment one night and their grandmother’s the next—may have trouble getting to school from a new neighborhood.

There are bureaucratic reasons as well. For example, when the building housing P.S. 2 in the Morrisania section of the Bronx was redesigned to serve high school students, the younger children were reassigned to a school building nearly half a mile away. A large number of pupils simply don’t make it to the new location every day. At P.S. 2, an astonishing 42 percent of the students had more than 20 absences in the 2007–08 school year, according to the analysis of DOE data by the Center for New York City Affairs.

*Responsibility  
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New York City parents have also long complained of erratic and unpredictable school bus service. Children who take school buses tend to have lower rates of attendance than those who walk to school, because a child who misses a bus may have no other way to get to school, according to school officials. Special education students can be inexplicably assigned to schools on the other end of their borough, reports one Bronx family worker. And leaders in wheelchair-accessible schools, like Morrisania's P.S. 132, note that disabled children are particularly vulnerable since they have no alternative to the school bus service.

Another big effect on attendance may well be the most overlooked: the quality of the school. Both principals and parents will testify that cheerful, welcoming schools with engaging teachers have higher rates of attendance than gloomy, punitive schools—because the children want to be there. “It’s about the culture of the school,” says LaTrella Penny at Agenda for Children Tomorrow, a social services group which consults in the schools. “The school has to be a place that children want to come to.”

### HOW PRINCIPALS GET HELP

Responsibility for monitoring attendance rests almost entirely with the leadership of each school. In 2003, Chancellor Joel Klein effectively dismantled the old community school districts, each of which had a superintendent charged with monitoring attendance and deploying trained staff to assist schools with poor attendance rates. Today, attendance monitoring is done by a much smaller staff at the DOE’s central office and in the new, borough-wide Integrated Service Centers. They watch for problems and offer help to schools they see struggling, but the staff lacks formal power to intervene in an individual school’s operations.

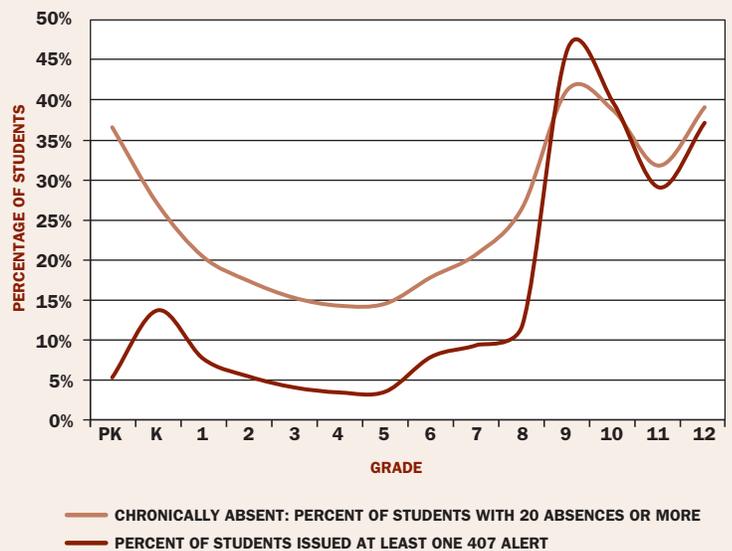
“Principals are like CEOs and they have been given a lot of flexibility in terms of making decisions,” says Lilian Garelick, the DOE official in charge of monitoring attendance. “We are here for support. It is up to the principals to say, ‘Well, OK, I have an issue.’”

Many principals ask for help from the Integrated Service Centers and from their chosen School Support Organizations, which have the responsibility to help principals deal with problems like this. But principal turnover has been high under the Klein administration, and it takes time for principals to establish deep ties in a neighborhood or gain knowledge about child and family welfare issues. The staff at the Bronx Integrated Service Center, which helps principals deal with poverty issues, spends a great deal of time coaching on the basics of attendance, child safety, homelessness, behavior and health.

## ATTENDANCE WARNINGS MASK THE TRUE NUMBER OF CHRONICALLY ABSENT STUDENTS IN THE LOWER GRADES

Attendance patterns vary greatly as children proceed through their educational years. There are high levels of absenteeism in each of the three important transition periods: the start of elementary, middle and high school. These periods of dramatic change can be perilous for marginal students who may rack up absences quickly and find themselves falling behind. This chart shows that the Department of Education’s primary attendance warning system—the 407 attendance alert—fails to identify and warn schools about the full number of chronically absent students. It is up to the schools to develop systems sensitive enough to catch and respond to all chronically absent students. This may or may not happen, depending on the quality of leadership in the school.

### COMPARING CHRONIC ABSENCE MEASURES PK–12



**SOURCE:** New York City Department of Education, requested data run from ATS, July 2008. Results include PK and all grades. Districts 75 and 79 excluded. Charter schools excluded.

**NOTES:** This chart incorporates data from two comparable student attendance datasets, both run after year close of the 2007–2008 school year: Explanation of the datasets is provided below. There were marginal differences in the number of students reported in each dataset, but these were not statistically significant.

**FOOTNOTES:** 1. Chronically absent is defined as missing more than 10 percent of the school year. In New York City, this is approximately 20 days or more of school.  
 2. From Individual Student Attendance Data Set: Data was obtained using each student’s universal identifier number, assuring that their absences would be tracked properly if they changed schools within the school year. All absences are assigned to the school and district the student was attending at the end of the school year.  
 3. From School Based 407 Alert Data Set: Data was obtained from the Department of Education’s “Form 407” attendance alert system. The DOE typically sends a 407 alert after a student has missed 10 consecutive days of school, 20 days over a 40 day period or 8 consecutive days if there has been a previous 407 alert. Schools can lower these thresholds to be more aggressive on attendance. Most don’t, but some do.

“We have so many new people out there,” observes Andaye DeLaCruz, the ISC’s senior youth development director.

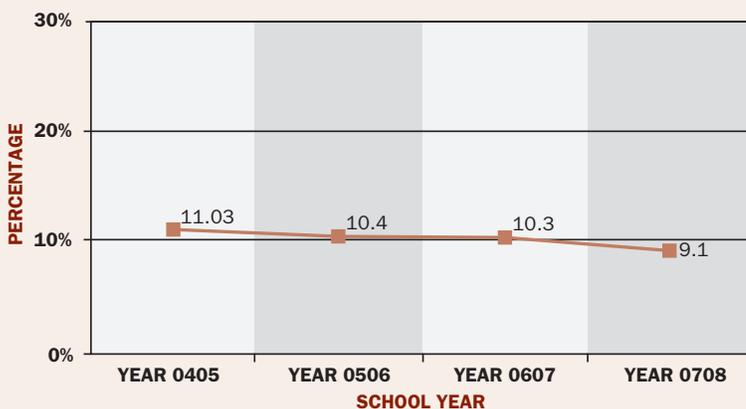
The Integrated Service Centers deploy attendance teachers, specially trained educators who replaced the old truant officers, to investigate the most serious cases of absenteeism—those cases that have generated a 407 form. Their caseloads are impossibly high: 392 attendance teachers were charged with investigating the cases of 178,605 pupils in 2007–08, or an average caseload of 456. The attendance teachers usually float among more than a half dozen schools, often miles apart in different neighborhoods—an “atomized” arrangement, in the words of one, that prevents the teachers from getting to know a neighborhood and doing the best possible job of connecting families with community supports. Much of the work of investigating and dealing with absenteeism can and should be done by the staff of an individual school. But even the most dedicated staffers say they can get bogged down if a family has complex problems that require time-consuming help.

And that is the rub, when it comes to dealing with chronic attendance problems. Principals and their lieutenants will readily agree that attendance is crucial to their students’ success and the success of their school and many do pay close attention. But it is just one number among many that they are judged on—and a weak number at that.

### FEWER ELEMENTARY ATTENDANCE WARNINGS, BUT NUMBERS STILL HIGH

Schools are supposed to look into any unexcused absence immediately and work with the family to get the child back to school as soon as possible. Those schools who deal with attendance aggressively should see lower numbers of 407 attendance alerts, as more children return to school before an alert is automatically generated. Reducing the numbers of 407 alerts has been a priority for the Department of Education and the numbers have gone down over the last four years. [See page 48 for a full explanation of the DOE’s 407 Attendance Alert system.]

#### 407 ATTENDANCE ALERT TRENDS: SCHOOL YEARS 2004–05 TO 2007–08



■ AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS RECEIVING AT LEAST ONE 407 ALERT PER SCHOOL

**SOURCE:** New York City Department of Education, requested data run from ATS, July 2008. All data compiled after the close of the school year.

**NOTES:** Analysis includes both elementary and elementary-middle school hybrids. Charter schools excluded. District 75 and 79 schools excluded.

Schoolwide attendance counts for only 5 percent of a principal’s “grade” in the Progress Reports that the DOE makes public each year. The bulk of the grade is based on improvement in test scores. And the truth of the matter is, principals can get very good grades with very high rates of chronic absenteeism. The Center for New York City Affairs identified 124 schools, grades 6 or under, with chronic absentee levels above 30 percent or higher in the 2007–08 school year. Of those schools, 75 got an A or B. Certainly, these schools may be making progress with many of their students, but it begs the question: what is happening to the one-third that missed so much school? And should more attention be paid to their fate?

“As you can see, it’s complicated,” says the DOE’s Elayna Konstan. Attendance, while not a big factor, can make the difference between a B and C, she says. And she adds that attendance is scrutinized in a principal’s annual review and is something that their bosses take seriously. “Principals do understand that there is a very clear connection between attendance and academic achievement. We all agree to that,” she adds. “It’s really about what we all need to do to help.”

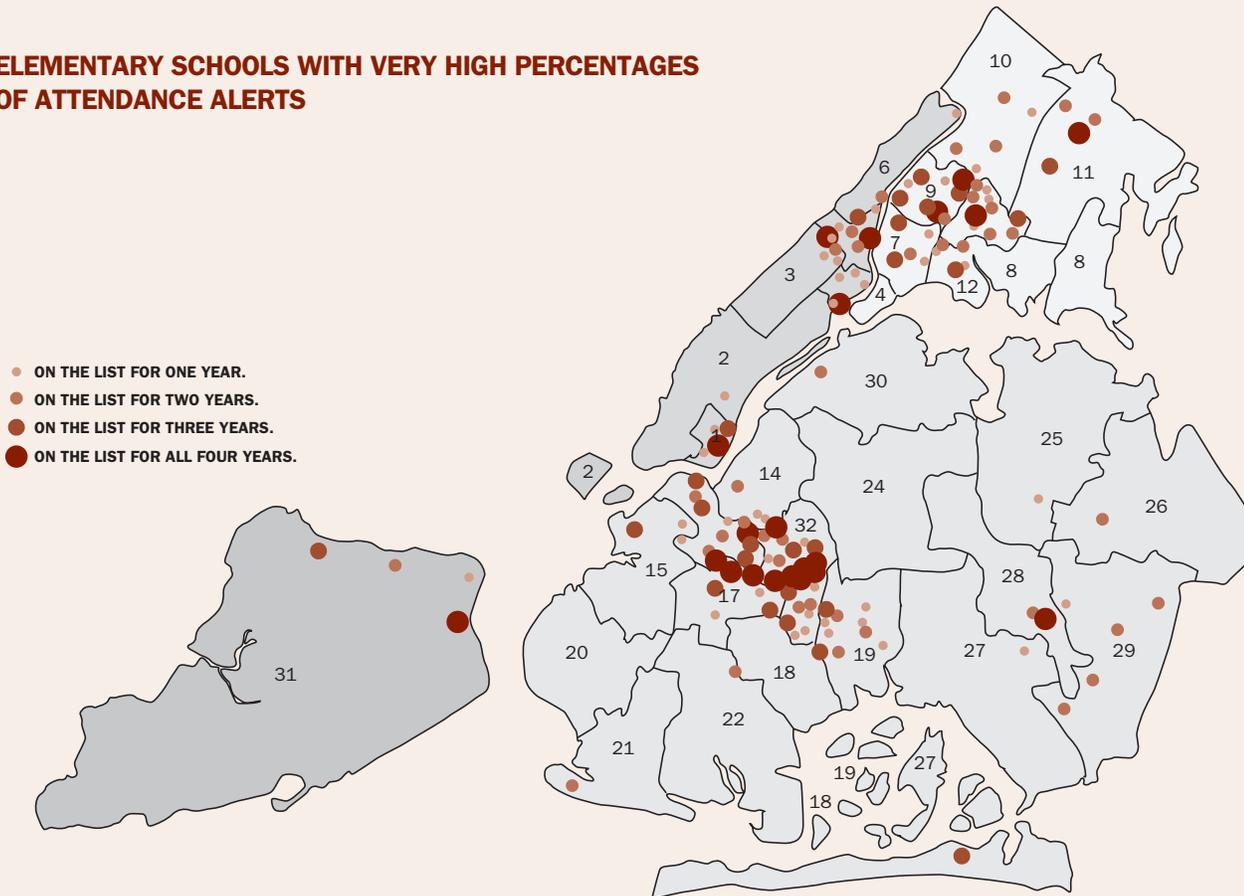
### POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

So what options are there? One possibility that has been gaining national attention is the idea of “community schools” where a strong nonprofit organization with an expertise in a particular community creates a formal partnership with the school. The community group takes the lead on handling social issues, freeing up the principal to focus on academics. “The school system can’t

## ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH HIGH NUMBERS OF ATTENDANCE ALERTS ARE TIGHTLY CLUSTERED IN CENTRAL BROOKLYN AND THE SOUTH BRONX.

The Department of Education sends a “407” attendance alert to a school whenever a student misses excessively high numbers of school days (see note below). The dots on this map represent the 10 percent of schools with the highest numbers of attendance alerts in the city. The color of the dots indicates how often the school fell onto this list over the last four school years. The largest concentrations of these schools are in Central Brooklyn and the South Bronx.

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WITH VERY HIGH PERCENTAGES OF ATTENDANCE ALERTS



**SOURCE:** Department of Education, ATS school-level data on 407 alerts, SY 04–05 to SY 07–08. Dots represent all schools designated as elementary schools by the DOE, which includes both elementary schools and elementary-junior high schools. Charter schools were excluded. Districts 75 and 79 were excluded.

**NOTES:** How the map was generated: The Center for New York City Affairs calculated the percentage of students issued 407s at each elementary school in the city for School Years 04–05 to 07–08. We standardized the percentages so they could be compared and selected the 10 percent of schools with the highest percentage of 407 attendance reports for each school year. All of these schools are represented on this map. Those schools that have had repeatedly high 407 numbers are designated with darker dots.

do it alone,” says Katherine Eckstein, a policy analyst for the Children’s Aid Society, a social services group that has led a movement to open community schools nationwide. “The issues are too great.” (See “Offering More Than Academics,” on page 36.) The agency worked with the DOE to establish community schools here in New York, beginning with I.S. 218 in Washington Heights, and is now working with 19 city schools.

The definition of a community school is still loose, but the idea is that the school building itself becomes a place where students can get their medical and mental health care along with high-quality tutoring and after-school programs. The object is to embed the school in the lives of local families and cut down the school time that children in poor communities tend to lose because of outside medical and social service appointments. These schools can be complicated to run—and finding the right

## ONE ZIP CODE WITH VERY DIFFERENT NUMBERS

Even in the same neighborhood, the rate of chronic absenteeism varies tremendously from school to school. This chart shows chronic absentee rates of 13 elementary schools and 18 middle schools in one zip code in the Bronx, 10456. It also shows how many times each school called the State Central Register to report a case of possible “educational neglect.” Staff at P.S. 2, for example, made 49 reports of educational neglect in 2007–08, while eight other schools in the same zip code made none. Although poor neighborhoods tend to have higher rates of chronic absenteeism and more suspected cases of abuse and neglect than middle class neighborhoods, this chart suggests that each school chooses its own way to deal with the issues.

### ATTENDANCE AND DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FOR ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN A SINGLE ZIP CODE: 10456

ELEMENTARY AND ELEMENTARY-MIDDLE SCHOOLS			NUMBER OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT <sup>1 2</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT <sup>1 2</sup>
District	School Name	GRADES		
09	P.S. 002 MORRISANIA	K-5	133	41.7
09	P.S. 132 GARRET A. MORGAN	PK-5	210	36.0
09	P.S. 053 BASHEER QUISIM	PK-5	475	35.9
08	P.S. 146 EDWARD COLLINS	PK-5	163	35.7
07	P.S. 157 GROVE HILL	PK-5	189	33.5
12	P.S. 212	PK-8	161	32.3
08	P.S. 140 EAGLE	PK-5	162	32.2
12	P.S. 198	PK-5	130	31.7
09	P.S. 063 AUTHOR'S ACADEMY	PK-5	151	30.0
09	P.S. 110 THEODORE SCHOENFELD	PK-5	112	26.9
09	P.S. 090 GEORGE MEANY	K-4	278	22.6
09	P.S. 055 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN	PK-5	134	19.6
09	P.S. X088 S. SILVERSTEIN LITTLE SCHOOL	K-3	58	18.8
<b>MIDDLE AND MIDDLE-HIGH SCHOOLS</b>				
08	M.S. 301 PAUL L. DUNBAR	6-8	181	48.1
12	NEW DAY ACADEMY	6-10	196	45.9
09	BRONX WRITING ACADEMY	6-8	231	42.6
07	SOUTH BRONX ACADEMY FOR APPLIED MEDIA	6-8	120	42.6
09	J.H.S. 166 ROBERTO CLEMENTE	5-8	390	40.4
09	I.S. 219 NEW VENTURE SCHOOL	6-8	172	36.4
09	FREDERICK DOUGLASS ACADEMY III SECONDARY SCHOOL	6-12	178	34.5
07	ACADEMY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS	6-8	103	34.1
12	BRONX STUDIO SCHOOL FOR WRITERS AND ARTISTS	6-8	71	33.6
12	BRONX LATIN	6-9	84	31.2
09	NEW MILLENNIUM BUSINESS ACADEMY MIDDLE SCHOOL	6-8	83	29.7
09	J.H.S. 145 ARTURO TOSCANINNI	5-8	128	26.2
09	URBAN SCIENCE ACADEMY	5-8	132	26.0
09	EXIMIUS COLLEGE PREPARATORY ACADEMY	6-11	112	25.9
09	COMPREHENSIVE MODEL SCHOOL PROJECT M.S. 327	6-8	44	20.0
09	MOTT HALL III	6-8	55	19.4
09	J.H.S. 022 JORDAN L. MOTT	5-8	131	18.6
09	KAPPA	5-8	33	11.1

**SOURCE:** New York City Department of Education, requested data run from ATS, July 2008, school year 2007-08.

**NOTES:** This chart incorporates data from two comparable student attendance datasets, both run after year close of the 2007–2008 school year. There were marginal differences in the number of students reported in each dataset. Results include PK and all grades. Districts 75 and 79 excluded. Charter schools excluded.

community partner is crucial, Eckstein says. But it's an important strategy to consider if the city is serious about trying to close the achievement gap.

There are simpler strategies as well. LaTrella Penny at Agenda for Children Tomorrow emphasizes that schools need to be a friendly haven for the child. “If the school is a place that children want to come to, no matter what’s going on at home, children are going to come to school,” she says. “I work with

NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH AT LEAST ONE 407 ALERT <sup>3</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS WITH AT LEAST ONE 407 ALERT <sup>3</sup>	NUMBER OF CALLS TO STATE CENTRAL REGISTER FOR EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT <sup>3</sup>	NUMBER OF SCR CALLS PER 100 STUDENTS <sup>3</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS RECEIVING FREE LUNCH <sup>3</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION <sup>3</sup>
89	29.0	49	15.96	85.0	31.6
98	16.8	3	0.51	53.6	20.0
280	21.1	4	0.30	90.0	3.2
71	14.6	0	0.00	91.6	9.7
87	14.8	30	5.10	83.2	7.3
84	16.3	0	0.00	86.8	9.9
107	20.0	0	0.00	93.3	12.1
47	10.6	4	0.90	93.4	23.5
58	11.8	0	0.00	90.2	11.2
55	12.8	0	0.00	94.4	22.3
133	11.3	5	0.42	99.5	7.2
59	8.5	14	2.02	95.1	11.1
34	11.8	1	0.35	92.7	7.0
86	24.0	2	0.56	90.5	15.9
137	34.2	2	0.50	84.5	9.2
131	25.1	6	1.15	83.7	7.3
66	24.5	3	1.12	81.8	12.6
198	21.3	10	1.08	93.9	14.6
113	25.3	12	2.69	85.9	13.2
132	26.7	6	1.21	73.9	3.2
44	15.3	1	0.35	92.7	12.5
28	13.5	4	1.92	84.1	7.2
40	15.5	0	0.00	77.1	6.6
60	23.3	5	1.95	77.0	12.1
65	13.6	3	0.63	90.1	11.9
75	15.6	9	1.88	75.8	12.3
70	17.7	0	0.00	72.2	1.0
16	7.4	1	0.46	90.3	0.0
18	6.5	2	0.72	84.2	3.2
65	9.7	20	2.99	97.5	7.6
8	2.8	0	0.00	72.4	0.0

**FOOTNOTES:** 1. Chronically absent is defined as missing more than 10 percent of the school year. In New York City, this is approximately 20 days or more of school.  
2. From Individual Student Attendance Data Set: Data was obtained using each student's universal identifier number, assuring that their absences would be tracked properly if they changed schools within the school year.  
3. From School Based 407 Alert Data Set: Data was obtained from the Department of Education "Form 407" attendance alert system. The DOE typically sends a 407 alert after a student has missed 10 consecutive days of school, 20 days over a 40 day period or 8 consecutive days if there has been a previous 407 alert. Schools can lower these thresholds to be more aggressive on attendance. Most don't, but some do. That is why it is best to compare the schools using Individual Student Attendance numbers.

young people who have been homeless and the parents really are on drugs—and they find their way to school because they feel more at home than home there.”

One thing is certain: each school needs to understand exactly what is behind the attendance problem before it can attempt to tackle it. Talking to school leaders, it is remarkable to see how differently they see their students and their attendance problems—even in the same neighborhood.

## CHRONIC ABSENCE STARTS YOUNG AND GROWS WITH AGE

Citywide, more than 20 percent of elementary school pupils missed more than a month of school in 2007–08; nearly 40 percent of high school students missed that much. Moreover, the rates of severe chronic absence increase with the grade level. While 4.5 percent of elementary pupils missed 38 days (nearly two months), 24 percent of high school students missed that much.

### CHRONIC AND SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM: NEW YORK CITY CITYWIDE TOTALS *School Year 2007–08*

GRADE	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS <sup>1</sup>	Students with 0 to 9 absences		Students with 10 to 19 absences		CHRONIC ABSENCE <sup>2</sup> Students with 20 to 37 absences	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
K to 5th	446,232	232,048	52.0	124,056	27.8	69,841	15.7
6th to 8th	227,121	113,003	49.8	60,329	26.6	36,813	16.2
9th to 12th	351,072	145,064	41.3	66,134	18.8	55,620	15.8
<b>ALL GRADE CITYWIDE TOTALS</b>	<b>1,024,425</b>	<b>490,115</b>	<b>47.8</b>	<b>250,519</b>	<b>24.5</b>	<b>162,274</b>	<b>15.8</b>

**SOURCE:** New York City Department of Education, requested data run from ATS, July 2008

**NOTES:** Attendance numbers and totals were generated after the close of the 2007–08 school year. Data was obtained using each student’s universal identifier number, assuring that their absences would be tracked properly if they changed schools within the school year. Students often leave the school system without notifying the school, thus building up absences. However, school officials are required to correct the absence numbers once they have ascertained that the student is no longer attending New York City public schools.

Center researchers interviewed leaders in six of the 13 elementary schools serving one zip code in and around Morrisania (the neighborhood’s two charter schools were excluded). In each case, the schools served almost entirely low-income families, but the percentage of kids with more than 20 absences a year varied widely from a high of 42 percent at P.S. 2 to a low of 19 percent at P.S. 88. (See chart on page 12.) While the schools had a similar mix of issues, leaders tended to identify one or two items driving their attendance problems—and these items tended to be different, as were their approaches on how to manage them. Some issues required medical or social service intervention: asthma, eviction, maternal depression, hunger, shifting shelter accommodations and foster care placement. Others were bureaucratic problems, like issues with transportation for special education pupils. Just as frequent, though, were cultural challenges like families that take their children out of school for weeks at a time to visit relatives outside the country, or others that routinely extend their weekends. “Mondays and Fridays were really bad days,” recalls Janet-Ann Sanderson-Brown, principal of P.S. 146, where 36 percent of the pupils were chronically absent in 2007–08.

“Being able to diagnose the cause of this is important. There are all sorts of different interventions,” says Balfanz at Johns Hopkins. “Somebody has to talk to the kid and see if it’s an easy or a hard fix. If it’s a hard fix, you’ve got to have somebody who can spend more time on it.”

### MAKING SCHOOLS WELCOMING

Some principals, working with community based organizations, have helped to make their schools attractive and safe for parents and caregivers, too—especially important in neighborhoods with high rates of homelessness, single-parent families, grandparents raising children, high unemployment rates and other difficulties that affect life at home.

When Principal Paul Cannon arrived at P.S. 140 in Morrisania in 2003, it was on the state’s list of schools facing possible closure and its attendance rate was a dismal 85 percent. Today, test scores are soaring and the school is moving off the state’s list. Schoolwide attendance was at 90 percent by the end of the last school year.

**SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENCE<sup>3</sup>**

Students with 38 or more absences

Number	Percent
20,287	4.5
16,976	7.5
84,254	24.0
<b>121,517</b>	<b>11.9</b>

**TOTAL PERCENT OF STUDENTS WITH CHRONIC AND SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENCE<sup>4</sup>**

20.2
23.7
39.8

**FOOTNOTES:** 1. Numbers represent all students within this grade citywide. Grade PK excluded. Charter schools excluded. Districts 75 and 79 have been included since their rates are detailed in the district chart on page 18.

2. National researchers define chronic absence as missing more than 10 percent of the school year. NYC has approximately 185 days in the school year.

3. National researchers define severe chronic absence as missing more than 20 percent of the school year.

4. Rounding accounts for tiny errors in the percent sums.

Cannon is going for the “home away from home” approach. He has set up the front lobby of the grand old school building to look like a living room, with a couch, chairs and lamps. Upstairs, there is another living room space which serves as a sort of neighborhood museum, with items like 8-track players and LPs. The school security officers are unusually chatty and welcoming, encouraging the school’s many elderly caregivers to stick around and spend some time at the school.

Breakfast is served all morning, so latecomers do not attend class hungry. There is stockroom of uniforms, clothing, books, pencils and pens. “If you don’t have it, we give it to you,” says assistant principal Colleen Burke. The school, across the street from a homeless shelter, is open all day, seven days a week, with recreational and tutoring programs run by the Kips Bay Boys and Girls Club, but staffed by off-duty teachers and counselors who get paid by Kips Bay and use the time to build tighter relationships with the kids. The doors don’t close until 10 p.m. On Sundays, Cannon comes back to the school and runs his own program, this one for fathers over 40. “We play basketball from two o’clock on Sundays until we drop—which is usually about 2:30,” he smiles.

This is possible to do on the school’s budget with the help of community groups like Kips Bay, Cannon says. “Using CBOs, you can extend the day. We are being creative about it.” Still, the school has a serious chronic attendance problem—32 percent of the children missed 20 days or more last year. These are often children who are in tough family situations, he says. He works on his numbers by making visits to the homeless shelters and building stronger relationships with foster care agencies. The families who most frequently avoid the school will get a personal visit from the principal himself. “It makes a difference,” Cannon says.

Luis Torres, principal of P.S. 55, whose population consists exclusively of children living in two massive housing projects in Morrisania, has cobbled together his own version of a community school. As a child growing up in the Soundview section of the Bronx, Torres witnessed his sister struggle to keep up with school she missed day after day because of asthma. When he became principal in 2005, Torres suspected that asthma was an important cause of his students’ attendance problems. Working with Montefiore Medical Center, he expanded a school-clinic partnership program and added a full-time outreach worker to assist families with health difficulties. He also developed new programs to reach out to new African immigrant families whose children attended the school—including a

*continued on page 48*

## ATTENDANCE IS A DRAMATIC PROBLEM IN MANY NEIGHBORHOODS AND THE CHALLENGE BEGINS IN THE ELEMENTARY YEARS

Schools in middle class neighborhoods tend to have lower rates of absenteeism than those in poor neighborhoods. Citywide, the rate of absenteeism increases as children get older. By high school, absenteeism is a significant problem in middle class neighborhoods and an almost overwhelming problem in poor neighborhoods. In Bayside, Queens (District 26), only 5 percent of elementary schools pupils missed a month of school in 2007–08; less than 1 percent missed two months. By high school, the proportion of Bayside students who missed at least a month of school climbed to 22 percent, 11 percent of whom missed nearly two months. In poor neighborhoods, the statistics at every grade level are much worse, and by high school they are truly alarming. In two central Brooklyn districts (16 and 19), nearly one-third of elementary school pupils missed a month of school and 8 percent missed nearly two months in 2007–08. In the same districts, *more than half* of the high school students missed more than a month of school; more than one-third missed nearly two months.

### CHRONIC AND SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM: NEW YORK CITY BY DISTRICT AND GRADE *School Year 2007-08*

DISTRICT <sup>1</sup>	GRADE <sup>2</sup>	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS	TOTAL PERCENT OF STUDENTS WITH CHRONIC AND SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENCE <sup>5</sup>
<b>DISTRICT 1: MANHATTAN</b>	K to 5th	5,582	21.7
Lower East Side, Chinatown	6th to 8th	2,728	24.7
	9th to 12th	3,423	33.3
<b>DISTRICT 2: MANHATTAN</b>	K to 5th	15,020	9.3
Most of Manhattan below 57th Street, Upper East Side	6th to 8th	6,998	10.1
	9th to 12th	40,760	39.4
<b>DISTRICT 3: MANHATTAN</b>	K to 5th	9,060	19.1
Upper West Side, Morningside Heights, Manhattan Village	6th to 8th	4,455	19.6
	9th to 12th	10,270	37.1
<b>DISTRICT 4: MANHATTAN</b>	K to 5th	7,187	26.3
Upper East Side, East Harlem	6th to 8th	3,871	32.0
	9th to 12th	3,496	26.6
<b>DISTRICT 5: MANHATTAN</b>	K to 5th	6,329	31.7
Harlem, Morningside Heights	6th to 8th	3,717	28.1
	9th to 12th	3,423	42.8
<b>DISTRICT 6: MANHATTAN</b>	K to 5th	14,209	19.7
Washington Heights, Inwood, Hamilton Heights	6th to 8th	7,889	20.7
	9th to 12th	5,385	33.4
<b>DISTRICT 7: THE BRONX</b>	K to 5th	8,633	29.7
Mott Haven, Port Morris, Morrisania, The Hub	6th to 8th	4,637	34.5
	9th to 12th	6,481	49.2
<b>DISTRICT 8: THE BRONX</b>	K to 5th	14,136	28.9
Morrisania, Castle Hill, Soundview	6th to 8th	7,152	33.8
	9th to 12th	12,315	49.4
<b>DISTRICT 9: THE BRONX</b>	K to 5th	18,384	28.5
Highbridge, Concourse, Claremont, Morris Heights, Mount Hope, Crotona Park East	6th to 8th	9,048	32.0
	9th to 12th	4,525	39.7
<b>DISTRICT 10: THE BRONX</b>	K to 5th	25,526	25.3
Morris Heights, Kingsbridge, Belmont, Fordham, Bedford Park, Riverdale	6th to 8th	12,847	28.9
	9th to 12th	22,969	41.0
<b>DISTRICT 11: THE BRONX</b>	K to 5th	19,236	24.7
Wakefield, Parkchester, Baychester, Williamsbridge, Co-Op City, Woodlawn	6th to 8th	9,333	27.8
	9th to 12th	10,857	35.6
<b>DISTRICT 12: THE BRONX</b>	K to 5th	11,608	32.8
Soundview, West Farms, Morrisania, Tremont, East Tremont, Crotona Park East	6th to 8th	5,643	34.2
	9th to 12th	7,157	51.7
<b>DISTRICT 13: BROOKLYN</b>	K to 5th	7,033	28.7
Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Bedford-Stuyvesant	6th to 8th	3,589	31.5
	9th to 12th	10,814	26.2
<b>DISTRICT 14: BROOKLYN</b>	K to 5th	8,452	18.6
Williamsburg, East Williamsburg, Greenpoint	6th to 8th	4,616	28.2
	9th to 12th	6,068	47.4
<b>DISTRICT 15: BROOKLYN</b>	K to 5th	14,559	14.0
Park Slope, Carroll Gardens, Boerum	6th to 8th	5,387	19.6
	9th to 12th	5,843	50.6
<b>DISTRICT 16: BROOKLYN</b>	K to 5th	5,323	30.0
Weeksville, Bushwick, Oceanhill	6th to 8th	2,539	37.3
	9th to 12th	3,706	61.0

Students with 0 to 9 absences		Students with 10 to 19 absences		CHRONIC ABSENCE <sup>3</sup> Students with 20 to 37 absences		SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENCE <sup>4</sup> Students with 38 or more absences	
Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2,731	48.9	1,640	29.4	946	16.9	265	4.7
1,380	50.6	673	24.7	433	15.9	242	8.9
1,525	44.6	759	22.2	520	15.2	619	18.1
10,025	66.7	3,604	24.0	1,194	7.9	197	1.3
4,989	71.3	1,303	18.6	542	7.7	164	2.3
16,773	41.2	7,915	19.4	6,785	16.6	9,287	22.8
4,694	51.8	2,634	29.1	1,410	15.6	322	3.6
2,410	54.1	1,174	26.4	569	12.8	302	6.8
4,698	45.7	1,757	17.1	1,464	14.3	2,351	22.9
3,144	43.7	2,150	29.9	1,503	20.9	390	5.4
1,561	40.3	1,072	27.7	804	20.8	434	11.2
1,886	53.9	681	19.5	490	14.0	439	12.6
2,423	38.3	1,897	30.0	1,491	23.6	518	8.2
1,655	44.5	1,019	27.4	714	19.2	329	8.9
1,211	35.4	748	21.9	649	19.0	815	23.8
7,109	50.0	4,296	30.2	2,299	16.2	505	3.6
4,057	51.4	2,199	27.9	1,161	14.7	472	6.0
2,375	44.1	1,212	22.5	935	17.4	863	16.0
3,587	41.5	2,478	28.7	1,885	21.8	683	7.9
1,708	36.8	1,328	28.6	1,056	22.8	545	11.8
1,848	28.5	1,444	22.3	1,368	21.1	1,821	28.1
5,777	40.9	4,279	30.3	3,113	22.0	967	6.8
2,691	37.6	2,046	28.6	1,584	22.1	831	11.6
3,831	31.1	2,396	19.5	2,424	19.7	3,664	29.8
7,715	42.0	5,432	29.5	3,911	21.3	1,326	7.2
3,641	40.2	2,508	27.7	1,826	20.2	1,073	11.9
1,650	36.5	1,079	23.8	885	19.6	911	20.1
11,362	44.5	7,716	30.2	4,956	19.4	1,492	5.8
5,405	42.1	3,730	29.0	2,498	19.4	1,214	9.4
9,074	39.5	4,484	19.5	3,872	16.9	5,539	24.1
9,013	46.9	5,470	28.4	3,586	18.6	1,167	6.1
3,985	42.7	2,758	29.6	1,801	19.3	789	8.5
5,032	46.3	1,956	18.0	1,629	15.0	2,240	20.6
4,377	37.7	3,429	29.5	2,840	24.5	962	8.3
2,095	37.1	1,619	28.7	1,259	22.3	670	11.9
1,862	26.0	1,593	22.3	1,583	22.1	2,119	29.6
2,991	42.5	2,024	28.8	1,490	21.2	528	7.5
1,449	40.4	1,009	28.1	730	20.3	401	11.2
5,951	55.0	2,028	18.8	1,434	13.3	1,401	13.0
4,672	55.3	2,212	26.2	1,266	15.0	302	3.6
2,124	46.0	1,191	25.8	842	18.2	459	9.9
1,920	31.6	1,274	21.0	1,251	20.6	1,623	26.7
8,523	58.5	3,995	27.4	1,714	11.8	327	2.2
2,932	54.4	1,401	26.0	782	14.5	272	5.0
1,717	29.4	1,168	20.0	1,198	20.5	1,760	30.1
2,095	39.4	1,631	30.6	1,165	21.9	432	8.1
832	32.8	761	30.0	582	22.9	364	14.3
759	20.5	687	18.5	722	19.5	1,538	41.5

CHART CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

**CHRONIC AND SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM:  
NEW YORK CITY BY DISTRICT AND GRADE** *School Year 2007-08 (Continued)*

DISTRICT <sup>1</sup>	GRADE <sup>2</sup>	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS	TOTAL PERCENT OF STUDENTS WITH CHRONIC AND SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENCE <sup>5</sup>
<b>DISTRICT 17: BROOKLYN</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>12,308</b>	<b>24.4</b>
Prospect Lefferts Gardens, Prospect Heights, Ditmas Park, Weeksville	6th to 8th	6,867	24.8
	9th to 12th	9,893	41.0
<b>DISTRICT 18: BROOKLYN</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>10,548</b>	<b>17.3</b>
Prospect Lefferts Gardens, Canarsie	6th to 8th	4,646	21.9
	9th to 12th	5,865	62.3
<b>DISTRICT 19: BROOKLYN</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>13,844</b>	<b>30.7</b>
Highland Park, East New York	6th to 8th	6,398	31.6
	9th to 12th	7,784	56.6
<b>DISTRICT 20: BROOKLYN</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>18,440</b>	<b>10.7</b>
Bay Ridge, Sunset Park, Borough Park, Dyker Heights, Bath Beach, Mapleton	6th to 8th	10,084	15.1
	9th to 12th	12,813	28.6
<b>DISTRICT 21: BROOKLYN</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>11,736</b>	<b>18.0</b>
Coney Island, Homecrest, Marine Park, Mapleton, Bath Beach	6th to 8th	8,707	19.5
	9th to 12th	13,958	34.0
<b>DISTRICT 22: BROOKLYN</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>17,626</b>	<b>14.2</b>
Flatbush, Flatlands, Sheepshead Bay, Prospect Lefferts Gardens, Marine Park	6th to 8th	7,654	16.7
	9th to 12th	12,281	25.5
<b>DISTRICT 23: BROOKLYN</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>6,563</b>	<b>35.8</b>
Ocean Hill, Brownsville	6th to 8th	4,220	30.8
	9th to 12th	1,710	45.5
<b>DISTRICT 24: QUEENS</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>24,969</b>	<b>11.8</b>
Corona, Elmhurst, Woodside, Glendale	6th to 8th	11,616	16.8
	9th to 12th	13,272	37.7
<b>DISTRICT 25: QUEENS</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>14,067</b>	<b>9.4</b>
Kew Gardens Hills, College Point, Flushing, Whitestone, Hillcrest	6th to 8th	7,184	12.8
	9th to 12th	8,816	36.2
<b>DISTRICT 26: QUEENS</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>9,884</b>	<b>5.2</b>
Oakland Gardens, Douglaston, Bayside, Fresh Meadows, Bellrose, Holliswood	6th to 8th	5,971	5.5
	9th to 12th	17,056	22.2
<b>DISTRICT 27: QUEENS</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>21,882</b>	<b>19.4</b>
Howard Beach, Ozone Park, Kew Gardens, South Jamaica, Woodhaven, Far Rockaway	6th to 8th	11,388	26.2
	9th to 12th	12,872	47.8
<b>DISTRICT 28: QUEENS</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>15,440</b>	<b>15.4</b>
Jamaica, South Jamaica, Richmond Hill, Glendale, Rego Park	6th to 8th	6,810	18.1
	9th to 12th	14,205	30.5
<b>DISTRICT 29: QUEENS</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>15,838</b>	<b>16.3</b>
Saint Albans, Cambria Heights, Rosedale, Jamaica, South Jamaica, Holliswood	6th to 8th	8,086	19.9
	9th to 12th	3,453	32.3
<b>DISTRICT 30: QUEENS</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>18,667</b>	<b>12.6</b>
Woodside, Astoria, East Elmhurst, Sunnyside, Ravenswood	6th to 8th	9,309	15.0
	9th to 12th	10,522	31.9
<b>DISTRICT 31: STATEN ISLAND</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>26,867</b>	<b>17.6</b>
Staten Island	6th to 8th	13,053	23.9
	9th to 12th	17,681	27.7
<b>DISTRICT 32: BROOKLYN</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>8,561</b>	<b>27.2</b>
Ridgewood, Bushwick	6th to 8th	4,835	25.9
	9th to 12th	3,312	56.2
<b>DISTRICT 75: CITYWIDE</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>8,699</b>	<b>41.2</b>
Special Education District	6th to 8th	5,291	45.0
	9th to 12th	11,087	51.0
<b>DISTRICT 79: CITYWIDE</b>	<b>K to 5th</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>43.8</b>
Alternative Education District	6th to 8th	553	61.3
	9th to 12th	17,000	70.0

SOURCE: New York City Department of Education, requested data run from ATS, July 2008

NOTES: Attendance numbers and totals were generated after the close of the 2007-08 school year. Data was obtained using each student's universal identifier number, assuring that their absences would be tracked properly if they changed schools within the school year.

Students with 0 to 9 absences		Students with 10 to 19 absences		CHRONIC ABSENCE <sup>3</sup> Students with 20 to 37 absences		SEVERE CHRONIC ABSENCE <sup>4</sup> Students with 38 or more absences	
Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
5,927	48.2	3,375	27.4	2,218	18.0	788	6.4
3,450	50.2	1,717	25.0	1,133	16.5	567	8.3
3,862	39.0	1,979	20.0	1,750	17.7	2,302	23.3
6,051	57.4	2,674	25.4	1,384	13.1	439	4.2
2,402	51.7	1,228	26.4	699	15.0	317	6.8
1,286	21.9	927	15.8	960	16.4	2,692	45.9
5,402	39.0	4,195	30.3	3,078	22.2	1,169	8.4
2,515	39.3	1,860	29.1	1,342	21.0	681	10.6
1,971	25.3	1,407	18.1	1,485	19.1	2,921	37.5
12,346	67.0	4,114	22.3	1,705	9.2	275	1.5
6,361	63.1	2,200	21.8	1,164	11.5	359	3.6
7,262	56.7	1,891	14.8	1,409	11.0	2,251	17.6
6,463	55.1	3,159	26.9	1,686	14.4	428	3.6
4,662	53.5	2,345	26.9	1,262	14.5	438	5.0
6,634	47.5	2,585	18.5	1,908	13.7	2,831	20.3
10,382	58.9	4,745	26.9	2,077	11.8	422	2.4
4,349	56.8	2,027	26.5	952	12.4	326	4.3
7,391	60.2	1,758	14.3	1,201	9.8	1,931	15.7
2,287	34.8	1,928	29.4	1,617	24.6	731	11.1
1,795	42.5	1,124	26.6	853	20.2	448	10.6
546	31.9	386	22.6	366	21.4	412	24.1
15,463	61.9	6,565	26.3	2,574	10.3	367	1.5
6,686	57.6	2,974	25.6	1,508	13.0	448	3.9
5,675	42.8	2,591	19.5	1,968	14.8	3,038	22.9
9,532	67.8	3,216	22.9	1,164	8.3	155	1.1
4,675	65.1	1,591	22.1	720	10.0	198	2.8
3,937	44.7	1,685	19.1	1,396	15.8	1,798	20.4
7,530	76.2	1,837	18.6	483	4.9	34	0.3
4,654	77.9	987	16.5	286	4.8	44	0.7
10,169	59.6	3,103	18.2	1,772	10.4	2,012	11.8
11,030	50.4	6,615	30.2	3,415	15.6	822	3.8
5,055	44.4	3,354	29.5	2,081	18.3	898	7.9
4,116	32.0	2,609	20.3	2,381	18.5	3,766	29.3
8,579	55.6	4,485	29.0	1,981	12.8	395	2.6
3,733	54.8	1,843	27.1	912	13.4	322	4.7
7,025	49.5	2,849	20.1	1,893	13.3	2,438	17.2
8,982	56.7	4,272	27.0	2,038	12.9	546	3.4
4,305	53.2	2,175	26.9	1,116	13.8	490	6.1
1,604	46.5	734	21.3	530	15.3	585	16.9
11,385	61.0	4,938	26.5	1,998	10.7	346	1.9
5,495	59.0	2,418	26.0	1,066	11.5	330	3.5
5,124	48.7	2,043	19.4	1,456	13.8	1,899	18.0
13,877	51.7	8,261	30.7	3,780	14.1	949	3.5
5,792	44.4	4,146	31.8	2,266	17.4	849	6.5
8,991	50.9	3,787	21.4	2,329	13.2	2,574	14.6
3,826	44.7	2,410	28.2	1,692	19.8	633	7.4
2,268	46.9	1,315	27.2	880	18.2	372	7.7
788	23.8	662	20.0	816	24.6	1,046	31.6
2,740	31.5	2,379	27.3	2,179	25.0	1,401	16.1
1,731	32.7	1,181	22.3	1,262	23.9	1,117	21.1
3,622	32.7	1,812	16.3	2,015	18.2	3,638	32.8
8	50.0	1	6.3	3	18.8	4	25.0
161	29.1	53	9.6	128	23.1	211	38.2
2,949	17.3	2,145	12.6	2,776	16.3	9,130	53.7

**FOOTNOTES:** 1. Neighborhoods provided for an approximate location. Not all neighborhoods are included.  
2. Numbers represent all students within the given district. Grade PK excluded. Charter schools excluded.  
3. National researchers define chronic absence as missing more than 10 percent of the school year.  
4. National researchers define severe chronic absence as missing more than 20 percent of the school year.  
5. Rounding accounts for tiny errors in the percent sums.

## Why Attendance Matters

Missing school in early grades sets the stage for failure.

Many parents and school districts consider kindergarten optional—a transition between pre-school and “real” school. But recent research by the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University shows that children who have poor attendance in kindergarten tend to do poorly in first grade, and that children with a history of poor attendance in the early elementary grades have lower levels of academic achievement throughout their school years.

Moreover, new research shows that chronic absenteeism in the early elementary years hurts not only the students who miss school, but also affects the achievement of an entire school. Schools with high levels of absenteeism tend to have slower-paced instruction overall, harming the achievement levels of strong students as well as those who struggle, a report by the Open Society Institute suggests.

It may seem obvious that children cannot learn if they are not in school, and that good attendance is a prerequisite for academic achievement. However, under No Child Left Behind, schools are primarily judged on their students’ performance on standardized tests in math and reading—not their attendance rates. And some researchers suggest the excessive emphasis on standardized tests under NCLB may actually depress attendance: as schools narrow the curriculum to boost math and reading scores, they may reduce time spent on social studies, science, art, music, physical education, lunch and recess—the very activities that make children want to come to school.

“These activities, which many students enjoy most, are being cut from the school day—and with them goes some of the children’s attachment to school and motivation to attend,” researchers Jane Sundius and Molly Farneth write in a new report published by the Open Society Institute, based on research in Baltimore.

The issue of chronic early absences has been largely overlooked, even though an estimated one-in-ten kindergartners and first graders are chronically absent nationally, say researchers Hedy N. Chang and Maria José Romero in a recent report by the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University.

“Going to school regularly in the early years is especially critical for children from families living in poverty, who are less likely to have the resources to help children make up for lost time in the classroom,” their report states. “Among poor children, chronic absence in kindergarten predicts the lowest levels of educational achievement at the end of fifth grade.” Children learn critical social and academic skills in the early elementary years, the researchers add. “Unless students attain these essential skills by third grade,

they require extra help to catch up and are at grave risk for eventually dropping out of school.”

The failure of urban elementary schools to address absenteeism in the early grades leaves middle schools with an almost impossible job: persuading young adolescents that attendance counts, while helping them catch up on years of lost work, according to Robert Balfanz, a researcher at Johns Hopkins University.

A longitudinal study by the Baltimore Education Research Project (BERC), which has followed a large cohort of pupils in the Baltimore Public School System beginning in first grade in 1999–2000, has found that *half* of the 7th graders in 2005–06 had missed at least a month of school at some point in their elementary school career. Nearly a quarter had experienced episodes of chronic absenteeism (defined as missing at least a month of school) in three or more of their five elementary years—and a substantial number had missed two or more months of school during these periods.

“There hasn’t been a focus,” says Balfanz, a member of the BERC team. “They all haven’t made the connection that it’s not just 10 percent of the kids not coming. It’s 30 to 40 percent—just a different 10 percent each day. And that really gums up the works.”

Moreover, as the years went by, the study found, higher achieving students left the public school system (presumably for private schools or schools outside the city), leaving the Baltimore schools with a high concentration of students with poor academic records and poor levels of attendance.

In first grade, more than 13 percent of the class was chronically absent (defined as missing one month of school) and another 5 percent had severe problems (missing two or more months of school), causing inevitable academic slowdowns as teachers tried to keep kids up to speed. The chronic absence numbers remained in the double-digits for the elementary school years, jumping to nearly 30 percent by 7th grade. By this time, the original class of 9,176 children has dwindled to 6,439. Almost 30 percent of the students, mostly higher achievers, had left the system. Of those remaining, more than 40 percent had been held back or experienced disruptions that forced them to lose a school year.

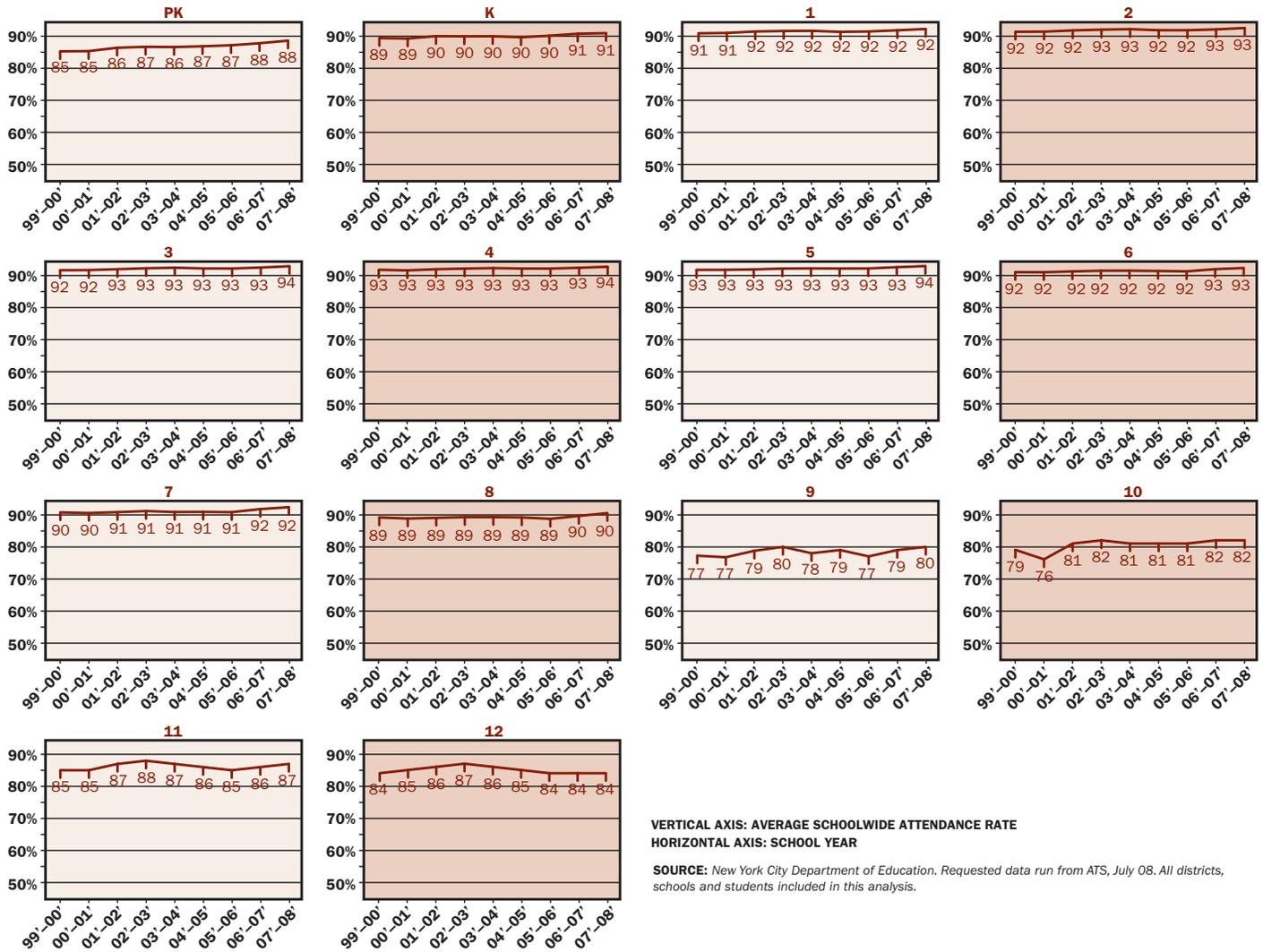
School officials were now dealing with a whole different level of challenge, since skipping school could be considered “normal” among the remaining students, Balfanz says.

“There is a normative behavior that develops that says, it’s OK to miss some school. Not much is going on, my siblings did it, my parents did it when they went to school,” he says. Countering this thinking requires intense energy from school leaders and teachers. By failing to intervene early on with a challenging but manageable number of kids, the elementary schools have left their counterparts in the middle schools with an even bigger job, he adds.

## ATTENDANCE IMPROVED OVER LAST 10 YEARS, BUT HUGE CHALLENGES REMAIN

Average schoolwide attendance has improved for all grade levels, except 12th grade, over the last 10 years. While the improvements may look marginal – it's often a difference of only one or two percent – they represent significant gains in the numbers of students attending school more regularly. However, this statistic still tends to mask the large numbers of students who are chronically absent. A 90 percent attendance rate is viewed as a solid number by many schools. But if a different 10 percent of kids are absent each day, a school with a 90 percent attendance rate may still have a very large number of children who miss many weeks of school.

### NYC AVERAGE SCHOOLWIDE ATTENDANCE RATES FOR EACH GRADE SCHOOL YEARS 1999–00 TO 2007–08



Sadly, for many students, future success or failure is determined by middle school. A separate longitudinal study of students in Philadelphia indicated that three out of every four sixth graders with attendance below 80 percent eventually dropped out. Students who paired this with one failing grade in an important course like math or English were even more likely to drop out, according to the study. “The kids start making a decision for themselves around 11 or 12 years old,” says Balfanz, at which point

they are vulnerable to giving up. “There are factors in the school pushing them out and factors in the community pulling them out.” ❖

*Full citations of the research reports mentioned in this article can be found on page 35.*

## Reporting Cases of Abuse or Neglect

To call or not to call? For teachers, this can be a tough decision.

As a group, New York City’s educators should be well-positioned to spot potential cases of child abuse or neglect. They see the city’s 1.1 million school-age children nearly every day, and are required by law to call the state child abuse and neglect hotline if they suspect any such problems in a family.

But many teachers and other school staff say they are poorly equipped to handle this responsibility, according to interviews with two dozen teachers, guidance counselors and social workers conducted by the Center for New York City Affairs. Most teachers reported that they have had only minimal training to deal with possible cases of abuse and neglect. Many yearned for more access to social services, which they felt could be more helpful than a call to the authorities.

Above all, these interviews and other research done for this report revealed that different schools have vastly different approaches to dealing with the problem. Some educators are too eager to report suspected abuse or neglect to the State Central Register (SCR), launching unwarranted investigations. Others won’t call in a problem they see. “A lot don’t want to take that responsibility,” says Jean Thomases, a consultant and veteran in the city schools and social work. “They don’t want to interfere, they don’t see it as their role.”

The result is a schizophrenic system in which schools on the same block, serving the same children, can have very different responses to potential cases of abuse and neglect. Some schools make many calls, while others make almost none, according to an analysis by the Center for New York City Affairs.

The analysis of 2007–08 Department of Education (DOE) attendance data shows, for example, that 50 elementary schools made *no* reports of educational neglect to the State Central Register despite the fact that more than 15 percent of their students had received at least one “407” attendance alert automatically issued by the DOE for excessive absences. On the other extreme, staff at P.S. 41, a school of 760 pupils in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, made *149 calls* to the state hotline for educational neglect, according to DOE data.

The center conducted its interviews with teachers, guidance counselors and social workers in the 18 months following the 2006 murder of Nixmary Brown. Each interview subject completed a survey designed by the center. In general, interviewees were granted anonymity.

All reported they had received the mandatory two-hour child abuse training course given to teachers at the beginning of their careers, and most felt their training was adequate for dealing with the most serious problems. However, many said they were less certain about how to deal with less urgent, but far more common problems. “The abuse cases, we’re catching,” said one Bronx elementary school teacher. “But the neglect cases we may be aware of? We’re not very successful in intervening.”

Some teachers said their principals offer lots of guidance and support in finding social services for troubled families, while others leave teachers to shift for themselves.

### IS IT NEGLECT OR POVERTY?

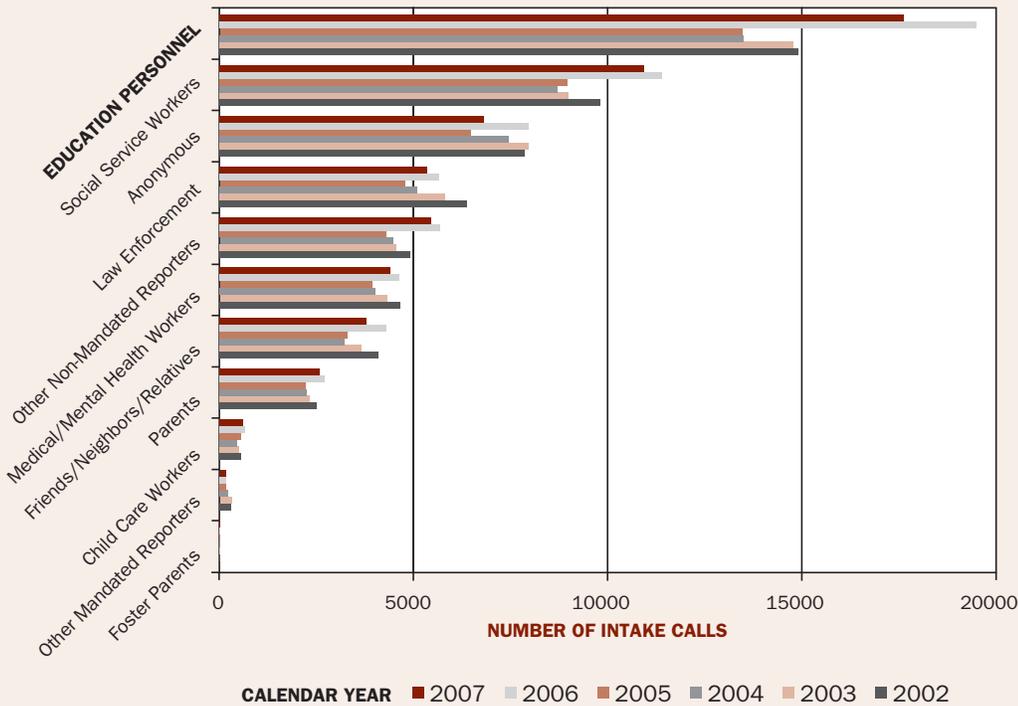
Almost all those who responded to the survey reported having students over the years who suffered from poor care. Some came to school dirty or in filthy clothes. Others were too often ravenously hungry. Some lacked coats in the cold weather or eyeglasses to see the blackboard. And there were frequent problems with class attendance, concentration, depression or excessive aggression. All can be signs that a child may be neglected, abused or in some way poorly treated at home. But they are also common side effects of poverty, problems that could be helped by the intervention of a community social services group or an industrious outreach worker.

*“The abuse cases, we’re catching,” said one Bronx teacher. “But the neglect cases we may be aware of? We’re not very successful in intervening.”*

## SCHOOL WORKERS TOPS IN CALLS TO CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE

Educators make more calls of suspected abuse or neglect than any other reporting group, including other mandated reporters like social service workers, police officers and medical workers. The number of calls from the schools spiked sharply after the January 2006 murder of Nixzmary Brown and remains high today.

### NUMBER OF CALLS TO THE STATE CENTRAL REGISTER BY REPORTER 2002–2007



SOURCE: State Central Register intake report data provided by the Administration for Children's Services for CY 2002 to 2007

The DOE requires all schools to offer some form of staff development on child abuse or mental health issues each fall, but the details are at the discretion of each school. “Whether it takes 15 minutes, 30 minutes, an hour—that’s up to the principal,” says Jose Marquez, the DOE coordinator of child abuse and neglect prevention services.

In the past, the 32 school districts could provide direction and support, but the district offices were effectively closed under Chancellor Klein’s first wave of reform in 2003. Today, responsibility for any training—along with the associated cost—is borne by the principals working with their chosen School Support Organizations.

In response to a spate of child deaths statewide, Albany has stiffened the state social services law to require teachers to call in suspicions themselves, instead of working through guidance staff, social workers or principals as they have long done. At the same time, the DOE has put new systems in place to better track attendance and record whether principals and attendance staff have reported unexplained extended absences to the SCR.

These measures, combined with widespread fear of another public tragedy, resulted in a huge increase in the numbers of reports from the schools, many of them unfounded. In 2007, New York City educators called in nearly 18,000 reports to the SCR—almost as many as social services, law enforcement and medical professionals combined, amounting to nearly one-third of all reports made

from New York City that year. (See chart, page 23.) During the first six months of 2008, the pace of SCR reports from school staff increased by nearly 10 percent.

Only 38 percent of the reports from schools were deemed serious enough to warrant further action by the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) in 2007. That proportion is lower than any other group of mandated reporters. Calls from social workers merited ACS intervention about half the time while police calls warranted ACS response 62 percent of the time. (See chart, below.)

Marquez says he recognizes how subjective these calls often are. “Physical abuse, the black and white issues, obviously trigger a report,” he says. “There’s very little judgment, very little risk, because you know you’ve got to call.” But children who may be dealing with a parent’s neglect are different, he says. “It’s grey, and you’re not sure. It is a judgment call, and I think that is the more difficult piece of this.”

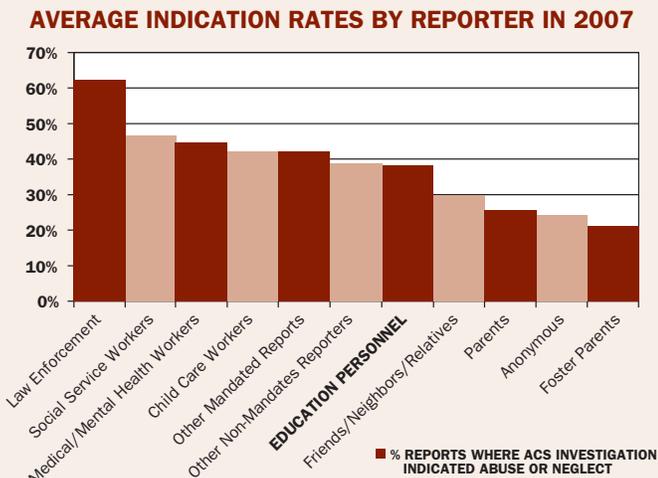
So what help do teachers have in cases like these? More than half of the teachers interviewed by the center could recall at least one incident where they felt they had to make a tough call. They usually consulted other staff, like guidance counselors or social workers, and sought out the help of their principals or administrators. But there were times when this was not enough and the teachers longed for a more professional assist, either from their own school or from an outside agency.

### HOW TEACHERS GET GUIDANCE

Aisha Shakti Hakim, a young special education teacher, started her career in working class Brooklyn. One little boy, she recalled, often came to school smelling bad and needing his clothes washed. He was also hungry. “I made sure just to buy lunch for him myself and ask him about his clothes. I

### SCHOOL REPORTS LESS LIKELY TO STAND UP TO INVESTIGATION

All New York City calls accepted by the state child abuse hotline are sent to the Administration for Children’s Services for investigation. If investigators find reason to believe abuse or neglect may have taken place, the report is “indicated” and usually followed up with services or an intervention. Other cases are deemed “unfounded” and usually closed. Calls from school staff are less likely to stand up to investigation than calls from other groups of professionals mandated to report suspicions of abuse or neglect. Of course, school employees have contact with more children than other mandated reporters.



SOURCE: State Central Register intake and indication rate data provided by the Administration for Children’s Services for CY 2007

### CHILDREN WITH EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT ALLEGATION ONLY BEFORE AND AFTER NIXZMARY BROWN’S JANUARY 2006 MURDER

Schools can report parents for “educational neglect” when they fail to get their children to school regularly or actively impede their education. Educational neglect reports to the state child abuse hotline nearly doubled in the year that Nixzmary Brown disappeared from school and was subsequently murdered. This number has continued to rise. Today, 10 percent of New York City hotline calls are educational neglect reports. This chart also reveals that many of these calls come from high schools, where long absences may be due to a teenager’s decision not to go to school rather than a parent actively preventing the teen’s attendance. Truancy alone is not justification for pursuing a case of educational neglect.

SY 2004-05	AGE	NUMBER	% INDICATED
	6-8	648	46.0%
	9-11	677	44.9%
	12-14	1,529	31.2%
	15-17	2,688	27.1%
	<b>Total # of School-Age Children</b>	<b>5,542</b>	<b>32.6%</b>
SY 2005-06	AGE	NUMBER	% INDICATED
	6-8	1,072	53.3%
	9-11	987	52.0%
	12-14	2,317	42.9%
	15-17	3,926	35.0%
	<b>Total # of School-Age Children</b>	<b>8,302</b>	<b>41.6%</b>
SY 2006-07	AGE	NUMBER	% INDICATED
	6-8	1,098	49.6%
	9-11	1,032	43.2%
	12-14	2,362	35.2%
	15-17	4,220	30.5%
	<b>Total # of School-Age Children</b>	<b>8,712</b>	<b>35.7%</b>

SOURCE: Administration for Children’s Services, calls to the State Central Register. SY 2004-05 to 2006-07. These calls are for educational neglect only. Calls with multiple allegations are not included in these numbers. “% Indicated” refers to the percentage of reports warranting further action by ACS.

didn't know what was happening." She said she used her own friends in the community and tried to help him best she could—but the school had little available to assist him. Hakim later moved to the Brooklyn New School in Carroll Gardens, a well-regarded school which admits children by lottery. It serves a mix of upper middle class children of educated parents and low income kids from nearby Red Hook. The difference was dramatic, Hakim says. If any child is having a problem, she can count on help from a big team. "There is pretty intense intervention."

Principal Anna Allenbrook, at the Brooklyn New School, says the school rarely, if ever, needs to call the SCR, even though about a fifth of the students need some form of intensive help at any one time. Instead, she says, the staff works with the family, employing the help of outside community organizations. They can do this because the school has created a close relationship with the parents. "The key word is trust," Allenbrook says. "If there is no trust, this isn't going to work."

Of course, schools serving a high proportion of poor children are likely to face far greater numbers of more serious situations. In these cases, the city should consider offering help from professional social service groups with respected ties to the neighborhood, says Norma Martin, assistant executive director of the Brooklyn Bureau of Community Service. A community-based social worker could get to know the staff, working the halls and assisting with all of the problematic cases. This would help ensure that serious cases are indeed called in and lesser problems are handled by other means. Martin has run programs like this over the years—and has been impressed with what one well-trained worker can do. "You can have a big impact on a school," she says.

Dramatically different approaches to these problems can even exist among schools on the same city block. Caroline Bear worked as a social worker for two years with Bridge Builders (see page 31), a collaborative of Bronx-based organizations doing family support work in three elementary schools in Highbridge—schools so close, they often had different kids from the same floor of a single apartment building. Yet the school administrations couldn't be more different, she says. Bear recalls one principal who tried to anticipate problems, employing, for example, a tireless attendance monitor who would quickly follow up unexplained absences with a visit to the home, armed with a Rolodex of local groups who might be of help to a family in need. At the other end of the spectrum was a school where the principal paid little attention to attendance, Bear says. (After receiving a D on its 2007 progress report, the principal hired an assistant tasked with more aggressive attendance and family outreach work, Bear reports. The school's grade rose to an overall C this past year and its achievement scores have been climbing.)

In talking to administrators, it's clear their personal reactions to a situation will often make the difference between whether ACS is called in or not. Principals and other administrators insist the threat of an ACS call is often the only tool they have to get the attention of parents who are particularly lax on attendance and other school issues. There are also teachers and others who are worried about making headlines—and are quick to call in any suspicion. Even in the Bridge Builders schools, teachers would fail to ask for the consult. Bear says she was often frustrated. "I said, why didn't you refer them to me? Their response was always: 'I don't want another Nixzmary.'"

Even so, better training and adequate support might decrease the number of unfounded reports while giving schools a way to help troubled families before a problem is grave enough to warrant the attention of ACS.

"The school system needs to be in a good position to have the resources and services that families need at the earliest sign of any problem," says Zeinab Chahine, who directed the Division of Child Protection, the investigative arm of the ACS, for many years before taking a job with Casey Family Programs. It is to the school's benefit, she adds. If students' family lives are stable, they will come to class consistently, with a better focus on their studies.

"It's a win-win situation for both," she says. "It helps a school meet its own goals in educating kids—and it serves at the same time to prevent child abuse and neglect. It's doing the job earlier through the schools." ❖

*Administrators' personal reactions to a situation will often make the difference between whether ACS is called or not.*

## Schools and Communities

Tightening the bonds between public schools and families in need.

What happens when a young child comes to school dirty or hungry for several days? Or a student is frequently tardy? What if a child's behavior suddenly changes, causing a teacher to suspect something is disrupting his or her home life, yet there's no good reason to suspect any abuse or neglect?

It depends. Some schools know how to guide parents toward help and head off a greater crisis. Other schools can, at the very least, steer a child into an after-school program to take pressure off a stressed-out parent. But in some schools, guidance staff say, the staff is stretched so thin that they can do little more than telephone a child's home, put a family on a waiting list for social services in the community, and keep a watchful eye.

The Center for New York City Affairs interviewed dozens of school teachers, guidance counselors, city officials, nonprofit executives and frontline child welfare workers for this report. Many expressed deep concern about the home lives of children whose families struggle with poverty. Many said the schools, faced with tight budgets, have a limited capacity to connect families with appropriate help.

Still, our research found that individual school principals can play an important role in determining what supports a school might have: Some principals seek relationships with outside organizations that provide significant help to families in need. Other principals choose to focus nearly all their attention—and budget—on strictly academic support, and have fewer interactions with community organizations.

In the following pages, we present three short case studies of modest, school-based collaborations with community organizations. None of these collaborations—nor any others we know of—can claim with certainty that their work is causing sweeping, across-the-board changes in terms of strengthening families, overcoming chronic absenteeism and improving academic achievement. There are no simple solutions to the issues of child and family poverty.

But each of these case studies shows how schools, working closely with a community organization, can engage families that struggle with serious difficulties and make significant improvements in at least some children's lives. Lessons from these collaborations appear in the recommendations section of this report.

In 2006, nearly one-third of all the city's children under age 18 lived in poverty, according to the poverty measure recently developed by Mayor Bloomberg's Center for Economic Opportunity. For children living with a single parent, the poverty rate is much higher, at 42 percent. At the time of the last census, between half and two-thirds of families with children in 15 of the city's community districts were headed by a single mother.

Research has shown that when problems such as inadequate housing, joblessness, mental illness, domestic violence, substance abuse and poor health care descend upon a family, children may quickly fall behind in school, or lose interest in school altogether.

Schools can be one of the best places to identify and offer services to address such issues, say social welfare professionals. "When you have the ability to develop relationships informally with families, you have the ability to reach families who might not otherwise seek help," explains Michelle Yanche, staff director for the Neighborhood Family Services Coalition, which advocates for community-based human services in New York.

*"When you have the ability to develop relationships informally with families, you have the ability to reach families who might not otherwise seek help."*

In suburban and wealthier communities, schools traditionally have played an early-warning role, raising flags and following up when there appears to be trouble at home affecting a child's schooling, says Daphne Stephenson-Valcourt, who until recently directed preventive family support services at Leake & Watts, a nonprofit organization that works throughout the region. "In a middle class community, the school would call the parent and visit the home," she says. In such places, she says, it's simply assumed that schools have a role to play in preserving a child's well-being. "There's more compassion in higher income communities."

Asked what they thought would most help families of their school children, some teachers and guidance counselors we interviewed expressed frustration. "I think there should be some kind of office to help these families, to help them apply for food stamps, get a job or apply for a GED," said one Brooklyn elementary school teacher. "We have nothing. We have a parent coordinator. And she's not trained to do that."

More simply, some teachers observed that having just one person in their school who has a reasonable workload and is dedicated to family outreach on these kinds of issues—as opposed to school governance or academic issues—would make a real difference. "Having someone who handles families' needs, whose job it is specifically to get resources for them, that's what I'd like," said a Bronx elementary school teacher.

Teachers and counselors also noted that some parents don't trust the schools, and others don't respond well to attempts to reach out or offers of help.

"We refer a lot of parents for family counseling, but some of the kids you worry about the most, the parents won't participate," said a Brooklyn teacher whose elementary school collaborates with a local case management organization.

"I think we should intervene earlier once we've targeted a child who needs help," said another Brooklyn elementary school teacher. "Parents need to be more accountable and send their children to school every day, on time. If there were more accountability, they could see the benefits of having a good education."

There are structures in place within the school system for addressing family problems. Attendance specialists are responsible for responding to "407" alerts, which indicate when a child has missed a long period of school over a short time. Outreach and home visits are the purview of these attendance teachers, most of whom are responsible for multiple schools and thousands of students. Whenever possible, these specialists steer children back into school. (See "A Hidden Problem," page 7.) They can sometimes guide parents toward appropriate supports.

Schools also have "pupil personnel teams" responsible for assessing the needs of individual students, who are referred by teachers and guidance counselors. These teams may refer families to outside organizations for social services or to after-school programs and tutoring assistance.

Today, about one-fifth of the city's schools have licensed mental health services, following a rapid and massive expansion of the program. Clinics are able to provide therapy and some handle more extensive case management for children diagnosed with a mental illness.

Department of Education officials say that principals now have data tools unlike any they've had in the past, allowing them to more easily track performance, special needs, attendance and other information about individual students.

"Decisions should be made as close as possible to the kid," explains JoEllen Lynch, chief executive of the DOE's Partnership Support Office. When it comes to organizing assistance, she says, "It's about

*"Having someone who handles families' needs, whose job it is specifically to get resources for them, that's what I'd like," said one Bronx teacher.*

*“Higher performing schools can understand the problem, organize themselves to respond, and bring in the resources if they need them.”*

what’s happening in the classroom, and what kinds of support a family might need. The schools have tools and resources to do that in ways they haven’t before.”

“Higher performing schools can understand the problem, organize themselves to respond, and bring in the resources if they need them,” she adds.

Nonetheless, many professionals in the child welfare field, including leaders and staff of nonprofit social service organizations and some of the city’s child protective services investigators interviewed for this report, say there are far too many schools where staff is either overstretched or poorly organized for the difficult work of family and community engagement—especially in low-income neighborhoods, where the need is greatest.

“It’s punitive what happens here in the Bronx,” says Stephenson-Valcourt of Leake & Watts. “There’s often no relationship between the school and the parent. There’s often no compassion.” She and others argue that some schools are too quick to give up on parents and families.

Establishing trust and building relationships with families is central, says Anstiss Agnew, executive director of Forestdale Inc., a foster care and preventive family support agency in Queens. In some communities, parents are skittish about working with or even visiting schools. “Parents are easily intimidated by teachers and security guards,” says Agnew. “Schools can be a forbidding place for impoverished and immigrant families.”

**R**ichard Herstein, who oversees school-based mental health programs for the Children’s Aid Society, says many school principals want to find a way to more easily link families to legal services, housing help, and benefits advocacy. If schools can learn to bring concrete assistance to families, they can help win their trust.

New York has a remarkable infrastructure to build on, including a large network of community-based organizations that serve families and children. The city’s Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) contracts with nonprofit organizations to provide more than \$195 million in preventive family support services each year. Most of these services target families who have been investigated on suspicion of abuse or neglect; currently, the city reports there are more than 40,000 children in families receiving some kind of preventive service under an ACS contract.

Medicaid funds hundreds of millions of dollars worth of services provided by community-based mental health clinics. The city spends millions more on nonprofit-run food assistance programs, case management, homelessness prevention, legal services and more. And the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) oversees \$123 million in after school programs and services, most of it provided under contract by community organizations.

Most of these DYCD-funded organizations offer programs inside school buildings. A few have social work services, including 16 that integrate ACS-funded preventive family support services and counseling into neighborhood “Beacon Schools,” which also offer recreation, youth development programs, adult education and other services during evening and weekend hours.

These relationships have particular objectives, and outreach to families is usually just one on a long list—if it’s there at all. The Beacon School social work programs seek family involvement. And some especially ambitious organizations, like Harlem Children’s Zone, devote tremendous resources to working with entire families. On a more modest scale, the same is true with Children’s Aid Society’s clinics and community schools, as with each of the three other programs described on the following pages. But most after-school programs do not.

With data collected for this report, we have considered two very crude measures that could reflect the degree to which focused, effective family engagement and outreach are undertaken in primary and middle schools.

One is absenteeism, measured by the rate of chronic absenteeism, on the one hand, and, similarly, by the rate of 407 alerts. Since 2006, the city has made a concerted effort to reduce these 407 alerts, and the numbers citywide have improved. A focused effort to engage productively with families of children who are chronically absent may have the same result.

Another measure to consider may be the number and quality of reports each school makes to the State Central Register (SCR), the state child abuse and neglect hotline. (See “Reporting Cases of Abuse and Neglect,” page 22.) Center researchers have had frequent conversations with frontline city child protective services staff who believe school-based neglect reports could often have been better handled by the school. In cases where the suspicion is related to severe tardiness, hunger, or behavioral issues, they say schools should make a solid initial effort to reach out to parents and guide families to assistance. In fact, calls from schools to the SCR are less likely than calls from other mandated reporters to result in an investigation that finds evidence that abuse or neglect has occurred.

The city’s stated policy is to encourage reports of child abuse or neglect whenever there is the slightest suspicion. “It is true that we want calls if there is a suspicion but what a suspicion is, is subjective,” says one city official. While decisions around reporting are bound to be imperfect, calling the SCR too quickly only diverts resources from cases that need them.

Using these measures as guides for improvements in the system could encourage principals to establish more intensive family outreach services and lead to greater collaboration with community-based organizations. And while no one wants to discourage reports of suspected abuse and neglect, greater training and stronger relationships with community organizations may have an impact helping school staff identify possible child neglect, on the one hand, and recognizing a call for help, on the other.

“I would like to see a complete change in the idea of what a school is supposed to be,” said a teacher we interviewed in a Manhattan elementary and middle school. “It should be a community-based place, a place where families are invited in.”

## CASE STUDY: *Crossroads*

The four siblings all sat like zombies in their classrooms, numb and distracted, impossible to engage. Their teachers knew there was a problem—and that it probably stemmed from their home. This made it a perfect case for *Crossroads*, which provides a range of social services designed, in part, to prevent family crises and reduce foster care placement of the children who attend P.S. 27 in Red Hook, Brooklyn.

*Crossroads* Director Sandra Campbell contacted the children’s mother, and learned that she was a survivor of domestic violence and living with her five children in a shelter. “She was really hesitant and didn’t trust people,” Campbell recalled. “I said ‘You know what, why don’t you just come in and see how you feel?’ She came.”

With the mother’s hesitant consent, Campbell visited the home, a dark and sparsely furnished apartment. She pulled back the curtains to let in some light, explaining to the mother that the physical environment was having a negative impact on the children.

Then she set to work on helping the family as a whole. She helped enroll the children in P.S. 27’s after-school program, which allowed them to leave Red Hook and see new things, like the Central Park Zoo. Their mom received counseling and help finding work at a local nonprofit organization.

*Using measures of absenteeism and abuse and neglect reporting as guides for improvements could encourage principals to establish more intensive family outreach services.*

*Home visits are meant to emphasize family bonding and allow the Crossroads staff to see children in a comfortable environment.*

The results, Campbell says, were easy to gauge. The children are now visibly happier and more successful in school. And at a Crossroads' Mother's Day picnic, the mother taught all the children Double Dutch. "Once someone comes in and meets with us, they rarely say no," Campbell explained. "It's more a matter of getting them here."

Campbell has worked in P.S. 27 for 13 years and her program, run by Good Shepherd Services, has been in the school, which also has middle and high school students, for 18 years. Campbell's office is large and brightly lit, as is the one where her colleagues—three social workers, a parent facilitator and a family worker—are stationed. The amount of space they have been allotted seems to reflect the program's positive relationship with the school. "I really enjoy knowing that they're right in the school," says guidance counselor Angela Gilchrist. "They are part of our community."

After a child is referred to the program by Gilchrist, or a teacher or the principal, Campbell makes the first difficult call to the parent. She requires parents to sign a permission slip before their children can be enrolled, and insists the family be open to home visits. If there's a baby in the house, Campbell requires either a home visit or a school visit once a week, just to be on the safe side. "There is not much change that will take place if we are not working with the entire family," she says.

She estimates that more than half of the families she contacts are willing to sign up. For the other half, she does what she can: calls them multiple times and asks teachers to let her know when they are in the building. If it doesn't work, she doesn't force the issue by threatening to call child welfare authorities. She recalls no instance when a parent's refusal to get help resulted in a call to the state's child abuse and neglect hotline. "If a family does not want to be involved, we will not take them," she says.

It helps, she adds, that Good Shepherd Services already has a positive reputation in the neighborhood and runs several other programs Campbell can draw on. She also takes pains to show families she's not out to get them. "We're not coming to inspect your house. We won't look in your closet, we're not looking in the refrigerator," she says. Instead, home visits are meant to emphasize family bonding and allow the Crossroads staff to see children in a comfortable environment.

Campbell says most of her cases involve disciplinary problems, parents feeling like they're not in control. But there are many that are based in poverty—and that's where the family worker, Melanie Martell, comes in. Martell will accompany families to housing court, if necessary, or help them get food stamps or health care. Martell relates a story of a grandmother who spoke only Spanish and didn't feel like she could advocate for her granddaughter, an 8th grader at the school. Martell, who speaks Spanish and lives in Red Hook herself, worked closely with the woman, introducing her to several resources in the neighborhood and at the school. Now, she says, the grandmother has learned some English, knows her rights, and isn't afraid to ask for a translator when she needs one.

One of the stated goals of Crossroads is to reduce abuse and neglect in the community by strengthening families. But sometimes a call to the abuse and neglect hotline is unavoidable. "We're not going to cover up for a family," says Campbell. "We're not losing our jobs or going to jail for it."

In one recent case, a neighborhood resident called the school concerned about Elena\*, a 9th grader. When they spoke with Elena, the truth came out: her mother was struggling with severe mental illness and Elena was worried that she could be dangerous. Rather than sending her home that afternoon, a Crossroads staffer called the State Central Register (SCR) immediately and then waited at the school until 9 p.m. for the girl to be taken into foster care. Campbell also called her mother and asked her to come in to the school so she could explain what was happening.

Once Elena was safe, Crossroads worked quickly to locate her uncle so she wouldn't have to stay long in a stranger's home. Elena's mother, who has since been hospitalized, is allowed only supervised visits. "We're helping her adjust to being in a new home, helping the family find resources and advocating

for the mom and uncle,” Campbell says. By acting almost as an intermediary between the city’s Administration for Children’s Services and the family, Crossroads offered Elena a smoother transition into foster care.

Crossroads works closely with the P.S. 27 after-school program, also run by Good Shepherd and funded by the city’s Department of Youth and Community Development. This allows for some innovative solutions to problems. For example, while Campbell’s team was counseling a 5th grader, the girl’s mom was hired to help out part-time with the after-school program. Both mother and daughter have made great strides. “We really look at the positive,” says Jose Cordero, who was the program’s site coordinator until recently. “It gives people hope.”

In general, Crossroads offers an intriguing model for how a community-based organization with both public and private funding and a full range of services can be fully integrated into a school. The program costs \$225,000 per year, nearly two-thirds of which comes from the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. The remaining \$65,000 is raised from private foundations. The program serves about 600 families each year. Of those, about 400 come for information and referral services, 180 for short-term help and about two dozen for intensive case management.

Of the 46 families Crossroads worked with intensively from January 2006 to August 2008, not one had a child removed from their home, according to Kathy B. Gordon, assistant executive director of Good Shepherd Services. The program measures its success according to a family’s improvement on a periodic assessment of five risk factors: environment, parental capabilities, family interactions, family safety and child well-being. From January 2006 to August 2008, more than 90 percent of families under intensive case management improved in at least one “risk factor” and nearly half improved in four, Gordon says.

The school itself has high rates of absenteeism and performed poorly on the city’s most recent School Progress Report. It faces tremendous challenges: about one-third of the school’s students are enrolled in special education.

The success of the program seems contingent on a receptive school administration. Campbell speaks highly of P.S. 27 Principal Sara Barnes and vice versa, both emphasizing the importance of mutual trust and respect. “I’m very impressed with the consistency of the support they’ve offered the school,” says Barnes. “Without the responsibility for academic performance, they’re able to be laser-focused on helping families.”

## CASE STUDY: *Bridge Builders*

7-year-old Tanya\* was consistently late to school, and a social worker from the Bridge Builders Collaborative, a preventive services organization in the Highbridge section of the Bronx, was worried. The social worker taught Tanya how to set an alarm clock so she could get up by herself and walk to school with friends. For a while that seemed to help, but Tanya soon fell back into her old ways. A home visit revealed the problem: sleeping in a room with younger siblings, Tanya rarely got a good night’s sleep and had trouble waking up. In the morning, she was expected to get her siblings dressed before she could leave for school. “She’s very parentified,” the social worker, Caroline Bear, recalls. She has problems that are bigger than she is.”

Bridge Builders, administered by the Fund for Social Change, is designed to identify children who might be at risk of abuse or neglect and to give their families the help they need to keep their children safe at home. The goals are twofold: to give schools a better way to deal with troubled families than simply calling the SCR, and to decrease the number of children taken from their families and placed in foster care.

*\*All children’s names have been changed in these case studies.*

*Crossroads offers an intriguing model for how a community-based organization with both public and private funding and a full range of services can be fully integrated into a school.*

Bridge Builders seems to be working on both counts: reports of abuse or neglect in the three census districts served by the collaborative declined by 29 percent between 2006 and 2007, while the number of reports for the larger community district serving the southwestern Bronx decreased by only 7 percent in the same period.

The number of children placed in foster care in those census tracts declined by 27 percent, while the number of placements in the larger community district actually rose by 20 percent in the same period, according to John Courtney, deputy director of Bridge Builders.

Two Bridge Builder staffers spend every Wednesday at Tanya's school, P.S. 73, meeting with at-risk students and parents who have been referred by the school. On Fridays, they go to two other Highbridge schools, P.S. 11 and P.S. 126. In off hours, they're making home visits and piecing together services, trying to provide a web of support to dozens of needy families. Bridge Builders also has a satellite office at a storefront office on Ogden Avenue, which gives parents the chance to ask for help without involving school officials. "We try to bridge the gap between parents and schools," says Bear, who has left Bridge Builders for a job at New York Foundling, a foster care and family support agency. She says that schools sometimes "jump the gun" on reports to the state abuse and neglect hotline, particularly in the wake of a highly publicized death, such as Nixmary Brown's murder in 2006.

Bridge Builders' school program is part of a wider strategy designed to decrease the need for foster care in Highbridge, which has long had one of the highest placement rates in the city. Bridge Builders also offers legal advice for parents, advocates for parents involved in the child welfare system, parenting classes, outreach and a range of supports from basic food and clothing to mentoring and mental health. While the school program has a budget of \$97,000, the Bridge Builders initiative has an overall budget of about \$800,000, and is funded by a consortium of foundations as a five-year pilot project.

One morning at P.S. 73, Bear, the Bridge Builders social worker, met with Juana, a pudgy 7-year-old with pigtails, struggling with both learning and physical disabilities. Bear had heard that Juana was good at math, so she guided her through an addition worksheet, patiently encouraging her as she counted out the answers on her fingers, and awarding her a sticker at the end. Then, gently, she posed a few questions about school and about the physical therapy exercises Juana is supposed to be doing at home. The whole process took about 20 minutes, after which Juana returned to class. Juana's mother had asked Bear to provide her daughter extra help. But that attention ultimately helped the entire family since Bear visited the home, talked to the mom, and checked in with other siblings as well.

In this case, she says, as in many of her cases, housing was also a problem. At the time, Juana's family was seeking a transfer from their overcrowded NYCHA apartment. Bear was able to refer families to the housing branch of the Citizens Advice Bureau for help. The Citizens Advice Bureau, a community organization, operates the Bridge Builders school program under a contract with the Fund for Social Change.

Not all her cases proceed as smoothly, however. Later that day, Bear met with an 8-year-old named Molly, who was quick to open up about her father's death the summer before. She had been alone in the house with him when he had a heart attack and collapsed on the bathroom floor. Molly seemed calm, almost numb, as she recounted what happened, clearly still processing the event and adjusting to life without her father. Yet months later, Bear says she was still trying to find a grief counseling program for the girl. In the meantime, other problems at the home became painfully apparent. During an unannounced visit, she found the apartment rife with roaches, trash and dog feces. When Molly's mother, who was pregnant and has two other children, repeatedly failed to acknowledge any problems in her home, insisting that everything was fine, Bear made the difficult decision to call the State Central Register. "If the parent's not willing to get help and the conditions are in fact neglectful, there's really no other choice," Bear says.

In cases where parents are more willing to be involved, Bridge Builders can be more forgiving. For example, Bear recalled the case of a young boy who came to school with a mark on his face. When confronted about it, he said that his mother had hit him with a belt. But when Bear visited the home, which doubled as a day care, she found his mother attentive and apologetic. The mother, then seven months pregnant, said she was feeling overwhelmed and it was a one-time mistake. Bear took her at her word. “It’s kind of like the quintessential Bridge Builders case,” she says. “When something is of great concern to the school, but it’s an isolated incident, let’s see if this works, let’s see what we can do.” Still, she monitored the case closely, and made sure the mother had support services. “It will be really telling how motivated she is, how receptive to interventions,” she says.

The relationship between Bridge Builders and its schools varies widely, and much depends on local school leadership. The program has gotten a warm reception at P.S. 11 and P.S. 126. But at P.S. 73, it was barely tolerated until a new principal arrived in 2007. Before that, the program was not given permanent office space, Bear says, nor was it adequately explained to the students or staff. Bear recounted one instance at P.S. 73 when a teacher asked her to babysit an unruly student. “You deal with bad kids, right?” the teacher had said within earshot of the student, insensitive to how a comment like that could stigmatize the child—and the program. Eventually, the principal there pulled the plug on Bridge Builders, instructing the parent coordinator to tell them to leave the school without even saying goodbye to their students.

By contrast, the school’s new principal, Jean Mirvil, has been supportive, inviting Bridge Builder staffers to speak at back-to-school events and PTA meetings. “That way, the communication was clear and nobody was scared of anybody,” Mirvil says. “We know we are all there to provide the kind of support that youngsters are in need of.”

Even in the first difficult year that it operated at P.S. 73, Bridge Builders managed to make some inroads. “It’s like a support system—especially for parents, for the school, for the student and for the administration,” says Assistant Principal Arcania Jaquez, who worked in P.S. 11, another Bridge Builders school, before coming to P.S. 73. She says that family problems are too often passed from one teacher to the next until they erupt and ACS has to be called. Bridge Builders provides a way to intervene before things reach that point, she says. “When your tooth hurts you, you go to the dentist,” she says. “When your child has problems impeding their education, you should deal with it.”

On the financial side, Bridge Builders’ school program is far less expensive than some of the other school-based models. In 2006, the program cost \$125,100 for all three schools combined. By 2008, the budget had decreased to \$97,000, as foundation grant commitments came to an end. Instead of two full-time staffers, the school program had just one full-time and one-part time staffer. The schools refer about 100 families a year.

## CASE STUDY: *Kidwise*

**O**lu Atanda-Ogunleye, a social worker based at a middle school in southeast Queens, remembers when he could help kids and parents with their social and emotional problems and not make a big deal out of it. Students could stop by his office for a chat, or he could stop by the lunchroom to see how they were doing. He could talk informally to parents, take children on what he called “therapeutic” field trips to places like the American Museum of Natural History, and even buy needy students clothes or groceries. He organized support groups for parents, gave Thanksgiving dinners to kids, mediated disputes between teachers and students, and even planned trips to colleges.

Now all that has changed, says Atanda-Ogunleye, project director for Kidwise, a mental health clinic housed in M.S. 72 and run by Safe Space, a nonprofit organization. Not only has his budget been slashed from \$367,000 in 2007–2008 to \$220,000 in 2008–2009, but new regulations promulgated

*The relationship between Bridge Builders and its schools varies widely, and much depends on local school leadership.*

*In the past, Kidwise stayed away from a medical model, and the word “therapy” was never used. The program seemed more like an extracurricular club.*

by the state’s Office of Mental Health as of July 1, 2008, mean he can no longer provide informal or “non-traditional” services. Now, students must register for counseling and present insurance cards or Medicaid cards to be seen in the clinic—making it more difficult for kids to come and for the social workers to engage them.

“When it was free, it was easy for kids to come,” Atanda-Ogunleye says. “Now there is a stigma. Kids say, ‘Your program is for crazy people.’”

The changes affect four non-traditional mental health clinics in New York City public schools: Kidwise, Graham-Windham, Brooklyn Psychotherapy, and the Institute for Community Living. Each school was originally chosen with an eye toward serving low-income children with below-average grades. The programs offered services such as crisis counseling, art therapy and parent support groups.

The Office of Mental Health (OMH), faced with a tight state budget, now focuses its efforts on traditional counseling and therapy, which can be reimbursed by Medicaid. “In the current fiscal climate, we just don’t have the resources to do nice things beyond our mission, which is mental health screening and reimbursement,” says OMH spokesman Jill Daniels.

In order to qualify for Medicaid funding, Kidwise must use licensed clinicians and offer regular 45-minute counseling sessions in private cubicles. In the past, Kidwise stayed away from a medical model, and, although it offered both individual and group counseling sessions, the word “therapy” was never used. The program seemed more like an extracurricular club. It officially served 100 student clients, but provided walk-in services to an additional 200 to 250.

The number of safety incidents at M.S. 72 declined significant from 2004 to 2007, according to Patrick Germain, director of planning for Safe Space. In 2004–05, there were 35 incidents involving Kidwise kids; in 2005–06 there were only 19. Although the data are incomplete for 2006–07, there were only seven incidents involving Kidwise students in the eight months for which data is available, Germaine says.

He attributes the decreases to the success of Kidwise in defusing children’s anger and anxiety. Moreover, students who participated in Safe Space showed significant improvement in their grades during the same period, he says.

Unlike most New York City middle schools, M.S. 72 made very few reports to the state’s child abuse and neglect hotline in calendar years 2005, 2006 and the first half of 2007, according to State Central Register data. Whenever school staff suspected problems in a child’s home, they could refer the young person to Kidwise, which made home visits, offered counseling services, invited parents to take part in group sessions and even referred families to preventive family support services offered by Safe Space. The program and the school have made reports to the state hotline when their concerns were strong.

Kidwise has helped reach students who were otherwise difficult to serve. For example, the program worked with a 16-year-old 8th grader who had missed several months of school after the birth of her baby in 2006, and then missed weeks more because of head lice. Concerned by her chronic absences, a social worker from Kidwise visited the girl’s home and found the ceiling falling in chunks and buckets of stagnant, smelly water set up to catch the leaks, according to Felicia Davis, assistant director. When Atanda-Ogunleye visited, he saw piles of live roaches scurrying in the refrigerator. Making matters worse, the 16-year-old had five siblings in the home in addition to her baby—and her mother seemed unwilling to admit that there was any problem.

Atanda-Ogunleye discovered that the Administration for Children’s Services had already contracted with a preventive services agency to help the family, but clearly the agency was not up to the task. Kidwise stayed involved, making home visits, taking the family grocery shopping, buying them cleaning supplies, and offering the girl’s mother the chance to take part in a parent support group—services it can no longer offer.

One of the things Kidwise's leaders are most concerned about losing is the parent support group, where staff quietly facilitate discussions among parents, who exchange ideas about challenges they have rearing their teenagers, including conflicts over dating, respect for adults, curfews and other issues. By empowering the parents and equipping them with new skills, the program could reach into a child's home and change the family dynamic, preventing problems before they show up at school, Kidwise staffers say.

Renee Hicks, former director of Kidwise who is now vice president of program operations at Safe Space, says she remembers a case where a mother, fresh out of rehab, was struggling with how to discipline her teenage daughter. "The friction between the two was very intense," Hicks says. The mother was even considering taking out a PINS (person in need of supervision) petition in Family Court. Instead, Hicks spoke with the two of them and found a common thread: a love for basketball. She encouraged the mother, then unemployed, to volunteer as a coach on her daughter's team. Over time, the tension between them eased and the mother decided not to pursue a PINS petition. The key, Hicks says, is to recognize that primary relationships, however dysfunctional, can usually be repaired and preserved.

"Long after many of us leave these jobs and go to other places, it's still going to be parent and child," she says. ❖

*"Long after many of us leave these jobs and go to other places, it's still going to be parent and child."*

## **SOURCES AND RESOURCES**

*See these articles to learn more about the topics in this report. Many have been cited in text. All are excellent sources of additional information.*

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## Offering More Than Academics

Community schools and the potential of “community schools lite.”

The strain of being both an educator and a social worker weighs heavily on Janet-Ann Sanderson-Brown, principal of P.S. 146 in the South Bronx, where children grapple with the effects of poverty, including poor attendance, asthma and chronic illness, homelessness, and unstable mental health. Often, she says, her pupils need more help than she can give them. Lacking enough trained counselors on her staff, Sanderson-Brown says she often resorts to calling an ambulance to take a distraught or violent child to a nearby psychiatric emergency room. “They’re very, very angry,” she says of some of her students.

Across the nation, educators and policy makers have been debating how best to reach children at schools like P.S. 146. Should schools focus tightly on academics to close the achievement gap between middle-class white and poor black and Hispanic children, as leaders like Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and black activist Al Sharpton maintain? Or should they provide a wide range of social services, as Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers suggested in a speech last summer? Poor children, she says, will excel academically only if they have adequate health care, family support and mental health services, offered in what she and others call “community schools.” Weingarten is part of an alternative national group, calling for a “broader, bolder approach” to education.

In some ways the debate is unproductive. Of course schools need to focus on academics, and they cannot blame poverty for their failure to hire good teachers and make schools attractive places for students. At the same time, it’s clear that if teachers at schools like P.S. 146 are to concentrate on academics, they need more help with social problems than they now receive.

The notion of community schools has met with derision from conservative critics. Blogger Mike Antonucci described Weingarten’s plan an “eye-opening proposal for expanding schools into wide-ranging community centers, with recreational activities, health clinics, cotton candy and clowns.” The Thomas B. Fordham Institute’s Chester “Checker” Finn said the schools were about “dental care, legal assistance, you name it, just about everything except high-level teaching and learning of important skills and content.”

But in New York City, community schools have a long history of linking children to social services. New York City is home to 19 community schools run by the Children’s Aid Society and a variety of similar schools run in partnership with organizations like Good Shepherd Services, the Education Alliance and Harlem Children’s Zone. In full flower, they offer a rich array of programs for children and their families, from pre-natal services to college planning, along with medical clinics, mental health services, after-school programs and tutoring. Katherine Eckstein, a policy analyst for the Children’s Aid Society, says the goal is to embed the school in the lives of local families, promoting the importance of education, and to cut down school time missed to medical appointments and home issues.

The Children’s Aid Society provides its schools with a skilled administrator who works side by side with the principal. This person works with school staff to determine what the students need most and is then responsible for finding money and other resources, building out local services and managing programs. The idea is to bring in community experience, allowing the principal to concentrate solely on educational issues.

“This person is certainly knowledgeable about education, but comes with a different set of expertise: a social worker, or a health professional, or a youth development expert,” Eckstein says.

There is evidence the community schools are successful. For example, a Children’s Aid Society analysis of its five oldest community schools shows that rates of special education referrals were 24 percent

lower than in comparable schools between 2001 and 2004. The analysis attributed the lower number of referrals to the fact that schools were able to work individually with students on issues such as behavior problems.

There is, however, the unavoidable issue of cost. The Children's Aid Society estimates that it spends an average of \$1.8 million for an elementary school with full programming. A bare bones budget would still be more than \$480,000. Even if these schools are highly successful, it is hard to raise money to support them.

One answer is to establish a less expensive version of community schools—call it “community schools lite.” Rather than paying for a whole range of services, principals in the city's highest-needs schools could determine which particular services they need most—health care for children with asthma, for example. They could then partner with a strong local organization with a talent for that issue and a commitment to work in the school over the long term. The principal and the organization would work together to hire a talented professional tasked with coordinating the group's services in the school as well as vetting and managing effective outside partnerships with other community based organizations.

The idea is to create a position that would reduce the need for outside crisis services and things like unnecessary special education referrals. Such a position could be funded from outside the schools, by powerful community partners or agencies like the Administration for Children's Services, which have a stake in seeing the schools do high quality crisis prevention work. Services could tap into existing funding streams, in many cases, from city and state agencies and federal programs.

This community services expert could also work to solidify productive outside relationships, which have become frayed thanks to new pressures on school leadership and relentless change at the Department of Education. “The constant turnover of staff in local schools, the new roles, different people to speak with, being sent to different people—it's like this constant runaround just to find out who to speak to,” observes Ralph Dumont, executive director of Lower East Side Family Union, an agency that used to do family support work in the schools. “For us on the outside looking in, it's thoroughly confusing.”

In neighborhoods like Morrisania, one of the city's poorest, and home to Sanderson-Brown's school, principals have been cobbling together their own version of “community schools lite,” using in-house staff, like social workers, guidance counselors, parent coordinators and family workers, to respond to problems as they become apparent. Principals also bring in help from outside organizations, depending on their greatest needs. The principal at P.S. 55 enlisted Montefiore Medical Center to deal with the school's high asthma rate; leaders at P.S. 132 tapped the social services group Turnaround for Children to help with mental health services and behavior problems; and the principal at P.S. 140 offers full-day programming for students and their families thanks to a partnership with Kip's Bay Girls and Boys Club. Principals testify that there are many productive relationships to be found in the community for those who look for them—and often the services are provided free or at low cost to the school. The partner organizations are happy to have a place to serve large numbers of children effectively.

Before joining the Children's Aid Society, Eckstein worked for the Department of Education at a regional office in the Bronx. City officials asked her to survey the schools to see who they were working with in the community. Almost all of the schools were working with one group or another, Eckstein said, but the partnerships were loose and haphazard. “They are providing one program to a certain number of kids and it's not necessarily connected to anything else in the school,” she says. A sophisticated nonprofit partnership could deal with this, creating a cohesive vision for school-based services. “It's about the coordination and integration of all of these things,” she says.

Of course, any talk of additional services in the schools is met with skepticism these days. Wall Street is in free fall, and it's likely that both schools and community service budgets will be slashed, at least

*The principal and an outside organization could jointly hire a talented professional tasked with coordinating services and managing effective community partnerships.*

*continued on page 48*

## THE SCHOOLS TO WATCH: ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS WITH THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN NYC

While schools all over the city face challenging attendance problems, the following schools are of particular concern. Thirty percent or more of the students are chronically absent at these schools. Principals must be made aware of the gravity of the problem and come up with strategies tailored to their schools to reduce the absence numbers. This chart also shows how many students have been the subject of “407” attendance alerts, the DOE’s way of warning principals that pupils are chronically absent. These numbers tend to be far lower than the number of students who actually are chronically absent because the system misses many kids who are sporadically absent. Finally, the chart shows how many calls were made to the State Central Register, known as the child abuse hotline, for “educational neglect.” Principals use the hotline to varying degrees.

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WHERE 30 PERCENT OR MORE OF STUDENTS ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT: *School Year 2007-08*

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS		GRADES	NUMBER OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT <sup>2</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT <sup>2</sup>
District	School Name			
12	P.S. 006 WEST FARMS	PK-5	350	47.7
09	P.S. 230 DR ROLAND N. PATTERSON	K-4	250	46.3
08	P.S. 048 JOSEPH R. DRAKE	PK-5	426	45.2
16	P.S. 304 CASIMIR PULASKI	PK-5	137	43.5
13	P.S. 305 DR. PETER RAY	PK-5	171	42.2
13	P.S. 093 WILLIAM H. PRESCOTT	PK-5	173	42.0
09	P.S. 002 MORRISANIA	K-5	133	41.7
31	P.S. 014 CORNELIUS VANDERBILT	PK-5	255	41.3
32	P.S. 299 THOMAS WARREN FIELD	PK-5	208	40.9
19	P.S. 260 BREUCKELEN	PK-6	169	40.3
13	P.S. 256 BENJAMIN BANNEKER	PK-5	164	40.3
31	P.S. 018 JOHN G. WHITTIER	PK-5	202	39.8
19	P.S. 190 SHEFFIELD	PK-5	144	39.8
12	P.S. 044 DAVID C. FARRAGUT	K-5	138	39.3
11	P.S. 111 SETON FALLS	PK-5	240	39.1
17	P.S. 191 PAUL ROBESON	PK-5	120	39.1
05	P.S. 197 JOHN B. RUSSWURM	PK-5	216	38.9
32	P.S. 045 HORACE E. GREENE	PK-5	279	38.3
12	THE SCHOOL OF SCIENCE AND APPLIED LEARNING	PK-5	253	38.1
07	P.S. 156 BENJAMIN BANNEKER	PK-5	256	38.0
16	P.S. 081 THADDEUS STEVENS	K-5	162	37.9
14	P.S. 059 WILLIAM FLOYD	PK-5	175	37.5
17	P.S. 398 WALTER WEAVER	PK-5	175	37.5
19	P.S. 013 ROBERTO CLEMENTE	PK-5	230	37.5
12	P.S. 102 JOSEPH O. LORETAN	PK-5	420	37.0
05	P.S. 036 MARGARET DOUGLAS	PK-2	163	37.0
14	P.S. 297 ABRAHAM STOCKTON	PK-5	143	36.9
19	P.S. 149 DANNY KAYE	PK-5	277	36.8
16	P.S. 335 GRANVILLE T. WOODS	PK-5	155	36.6
12	P.S. 197	PK-1	178	36.4
02	THE 47 AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE ENGLISH LOWER SCHOOL	PK-6	49	36.3
13	P.S. 067 CHARLES A. DORSEY	PK-5	86	36.3
13	P.S. 044 MARCUS GARVEY	PK-5	197	36.3
05	P.S. 046 ARTHUR TAPPAN	PK-6	280	36.3
13	P.S. 056 LEWIS H. LATIMER	PK-5	124	36.3
08	P.S. 152 EVERGREEN	PK-5	324	36.2
07	P.S. 277	PK-5	194	36.0
09	P.S. 132 GARRET A. MORGAN	PK-5	210	36.0
09	P.S. 053 BASHEER QUISIM	PK-5	475	35.9
16	P.S. 025 EUBIE BLAKE SCHOOL	PK-5	129	35.7
11	P.S. 112 BRONXWOOD	PK-5	223	35.7
08	P.S. 146 EDWARD COLLINS	PK-5	163	35.7
16	P.S. 262 EL HAJJ MALIK EL SHABAZZ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	PK-5	132	35.6
13	P.S. 287 BAILEY K. ASHFORD	PK-5	59	35.5
08	P.S. 075	PK-5	245	35.5
09	P.S. 011 HIGHBRIDGE	K-4	260	35.4
11	CORNERSTONE ACADEMY FOR SOCIAL ACTION	PK-5	117	35.3
07	P.S. 065 MOTHER HALE ACADEMY	PK-5	173	35.3
12	P.S. 050 CLARA BARTON	PK-5	209	35.1

All schools with grades 7 or higher have been excluded  
Chart sorted by highest percentage of chronically absent students

NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH AT LEAST ONE 407 ALERT <sup>3</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS WITH AT LEAST ONE 407 ALERT <sup>3</sup>	NUMBER OF CALLS TO STATE CENTRAL REGISTER FOR EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT <sup>3</sup>	NUMBER OF SCR CALLS PER 100 STUDENTS <sup>3</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS RECEIVING FREE LUNCH <sup>3,4</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION <sup>3,5</sup>
174	23.0	14	1.85	88.1	11.3
109	22.3	0	0.00	88.7	9.8
217	22.7	0	0.00	73.4	15.9
87	25.9	8	2.38	98.2	10.7
73	17.2	0	0.00	83.0	5.7
99	22.0	0	0.00	93.1	4.0
89	29.0	49	15.96	85.0	31.6
132	21.6	0	0.00	87.9	9.0
118	23.1	3	0.59	86.3	8.8
92	21.6	2	0.47	48.6	10.1
92	22.4	1	0.24	91.2	10.0
112	20.7	1	0.18	82.8	26.2
78	21.5	2	0.55	90.1	17.7
73	20.2	7	1.93	79.6	16.3
112	18.0	0	0.00	76.2	15.8
72	23.5	2	0.65	90.5	16.7
116	20.8	3	0.54	76.3	14.3
161	21.5	1	0.13	90.3	9.3
121	18.6	3	0.46	76.3	8.3
132	19.7	2	0.30	88.0	16.6
93	21.4	0	0.00	85.7	8.1
87	17.6	1	0.20	78.9	6.5
120	25.3	0	0.00	89.1	17.7
116	18.7	0	0.00	81.1	9.2
207	18.8	0	0.00	87.3	12.4
103	19.5	3	0.57	73.9	11.4
62	16.0	0	0.00	54.0	8.0
174	22.1	0	0.00	91.6	6.9
138	31.7	0	0.00	90.8	10.8
75	14.0	2	0.37	43.2	6.7
39	19.2	1	0.49	65.0	0.0
41	16.8	0	0.00	91.8	4.5
81	15.1	1	0.19	94.4	4.1
113	14.1	8	1.00	81.4	7.7
66	19.4	4	1.17	80.6	12.6
118	13.0	1	0.11	88.5	9.4
105	18.7	0	0.00	86.6	11.9
98	16.8	3	0.51	53.6	20.0
280	21.1	4	0.30	90.0	3.2
55	15.2	3	0.83	57.9	5.8
113	18.2	3	0.48	87.0	14.0
71	14.6	0	0.00	91.6	9.7
66	17.5	0	0.00	90.2	10.1
34	18.9	0	0.00	90.0	17.2
135	19.3	0	0.00	92.8	14.0
131	18.8	70	10.04	89.5	8.0
67	19.7	2	0.59	82.1	6.8
77	15.8	0	0.00	90.2	11.7
104	16.9	0	0.00	95.0	14.0

CHART CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WHERE 30 PERCENT OR MORE OF STUDENTS ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT: School Year 2007-08 (Continued)**

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS			NUMBER OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT <sup>2</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT <sup>2</sup>
District	School Name	GRADES		
12	P.S. 092 BRONX	PK-5	188	34.9
04	P.S. 38 ROBERTO CLEMENTE	PK-5	118	34.9
04	RIVER EAST ELEMENTARY	K-5	54	34.8
12	P.S. 067 MOHEGAN SCHOOL	PK-5	235	34.8
31	P.S. 044 THOMAS C. BROWN	PK-5	273	34.6
12	P.S. 134 GEORGE F. BRISTOW	PK-5	211	34.6
19	P.S. 345 PATROLMAN ROBERT BOLDEN	PK-5	241	34.2
08	NEW SCHOOL 1 P.S. 60	PK-3	141	34.2
21	P.S. 329 SURFSIDE	PK-5	213	34.2
12	P.S. 057 CRESCENT	PK-5	167	34.1
11	P.S. 078 ANNE HUTCHINSON	K-5	282	34.1
08	P.S. 138 SAMUEL RANDALL	PK-5	311	34.0
08	P.S. 130 ABRAM STEVENS HEWITT	PK-5	226	34.0
09	P.S. 070 MAX SCHOENFELD	K-5	491	33.9
04	P.S. 112 JOSE CELSO BARBOSA	PK-2	107	33.9
17	P.S. 289 GEORGE V. BROWER	PK-5	263	33.8
19	P.S. 224 HALE A. WOODRUFF	PK-6	279	33.5
07	P.S. 157 GROVE HILL	PK-5	189	33.5
32	P.S. 075 MAYDA CORTIELLA	PK-5	194	33.4
31	P.S. 031 WILLIAM T. DAVIS	PK-5	179	33.4
01	P.S. 015 ROBERTO CLEMENTE	PK-5	80	33.3
11	P.S. 021 PHILLIP H. SHERIDAN	K-5	286	33.3
12	P.S. 195	2-5	162	33.3
28	P.S. 048 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH	PK-5	123	33.2
10	P.S. 032 BELMONT	K-5	283	33.1
01	P.S. 142 AMALIA CASTRO	PK-5	141	32.9
09	P.S. 064 PURA BELPRE	K-5	297	32.6
31	P.S. 016 JOHN J. DRISCOLL	PK-5	343	32.6
05	P.S. 133 FRED R. MOORE	PK-6	109	32.5
32	P.S. 274 KOSCIUSKO	PK-5	257	32.4
10	P.S. I.S. 54	PK-5	154	32.4
28	P.S. 040 SAMUEL HUNTINGTON	PK-6	162	32.4
10	P.S. 091 BRONX	K-5	252	32.3
08	P.S. 140 EAGLE	PK-5	162	32.2
05	P.S. 200 THE JAMES MCCUNE SMITH SCHOOL	PK-6	227	32.1
09	P.S. 236 LANGSTON HUGHES	PK-2	119	32.1
10	P.S. 207	PK-2	161	32.0
04	P.S. 102 JACQUES CARTIER	PK-5	104	31.9
08	P.S. 107	PK-5	176	31.8
12	P.S. 198	PK-5	130	31.7
07	P.S. 220 MOTT HAVEN VILLAGE SCHOOL	PK-5	88	31.7
09	P.S. 204 MORRIS HEIGHTS	K-5	112	31.6
11	P.S. 041 GUN HILL ROAD	K-5	293	31.6
13	P.S. 133 WILLIAM A. BUTLER	PK-5	77	31.6
05	P.S. 194 COUNTEE CULLEN	K-5	91	31.5
09	P.S. 058	PK-6	140	31.5
10	P.S. 086 KINGSBRIDGE HEIGHTS	PK-6	527	31.4
14	P.S. 016 LEONARD DUNKLY	PK-5	118	31.4
01	P.S. 063 WILLIAM MCKINLEY	PK-5	64	31.4
10	RYER AVENUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	PK-5	216	31.0
12	P.S. 150 CHARLES JAMES FOX	PK-5	228	30.9
27	P.S. 215 LUCRETIA MOTT	PK-5	186	30.8
21	P.S. 188 MICHAEL E. BERDY	PK-5	195	30.8
08	P.S. 062 INOCENSIO CASANOVA	PK-5	214	30.7
05	P.S. 154 HARRIET TUBMAN	PK-5	134	30.7
01	P.S. 137 JOHN L. BERNSTEIN	PK-5	68	30.6
19	P.S. 158 WARWICK	PK-5	183	30.5
09	P.S. X199 THE SHAKESPEARE SCHOOL	PK-5	232	30.5
05	P.S. 123 MAHALIA JACKSON	PK-6	173	30.4
18	P.S. 272 CURTIS ESTABROOK	PK-5	216	30.3
10	P.S. 094 KINGS COLLEGE SCHOOL	K-5	320	30.3
07	P.S. 018 JOHN PETER ZENGER	PK-5	155	30.2
03	P.S. 191 AMSTERDAM	PK-5	87	30.2
05	P.S. 092 MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE	PK-5	99	30.2
27	P.S. 253	PK-5	148	30.1
10	P.S. 085 GREAT EXPECTATIONS	K-5	367	30.1
05	P.S. 129 JOHN H. FINLEY	PK-6	147	30.1

NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH AT LEAST ONE 407 ALERT <sup>3</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS WITH AT LEAST ONE 407 ALERT <sup>3</sup>	NUMBER OF CALLS TO STATE CENTRAL REGISTER FOR EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT <sup>3</sup>	NUMBER OF SCR CALLS PER 100 STUDENTS <sup>3</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS RECEIVING FREE LUNCH <sup>3,4</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION <sup>3,5</sup>
94	17.1	4	0.73	83.6	12.8
57	15.7	3	0.83	75.7	15.2
11	7.5	0	0.00	99.3	6.2
112	16.0	0	0.00	97.4	11.2
148	17.6	1	0.12	85.5	16.8
98	15.2	3	0.47	96.1	9.2
116	16.4	1	0.14	45.7	9.2
78	18.1	23	5.34	93.3	10.7
110	16.6	3	0.45	77.0	15.1
55	11.5	4	0.83	87.5	10.4
217	28.0	4	0.52	78.6	8.5
114	12.2	3	0.32	79.5	8.4
118	18.3	3	0.46	88.7	9.4
226	16.3	6	0.43	92.1	4.4
38	11.0	1	0.29	97.7	20.9
141	18.0	0	0.00	82.3	13.6
143	17.1	3	0.36	99.9	6.6
87	14.8	30	5.10	83.2	7.3
100	16.1	2	0.32	46.4	9.3
87	16.4	0	0.00	49.7	18.8
37	15.3	2	0.83	51.7	11.6
156	19.5	8	1.00	80.6	9.1
51	10.6	1	0.21	98.7	10.4
52	14.4	0	0.00	68.6	8.1
115	13.9	2	0.24	90.0	10.5
60	13.4	4	0.89	94.9	21.2
114	12.9	16	1.81	95.1	7.9
180	16.9	0	0.00	70.5	9.8
56	16.6	2	0.59	73.4	16.6
124	15.1	1	0.12	97.8	6.2
70	14.8	0	0.00	90.3	10.6
132	25.9	2	0.39	89.0	4.7
148	19.9	6	0.81	50.8	9.6
107	20.0	0	0.00	93.3	12.1
128	18.3	3	0.43	73.1	9.9
54	14.1	0	0.00	89.3	21.7
76	15.7	2	0.41	81.2	9.3
23	6.6	0	0.00	91.5	21.9
71	13.1	4	0.74	88.0	13.8
47	10.6	4	0.90	93.4	23.5
60	19.7	0	0.00	93.1	7.2
37	10.9	1	0.29	92.1	5.3
120	13.7	0	0.00	44.1	8.6
41	15.2	0	0.00	82.6	20.4
54	20.1	4	1.49	91.8	13.4
85	20.4	1	0.24	94.0	13.2
256	15.1	0	0.00	86.3	11.6
69	18.2	1	0.26	97.6	10.5
23	11.4	2	1.00	40.8	16.9
115	16.4	76	10.86	99.6	8.0
85	11.6	13	1.77	90.9	9.0
83	13.8	2	0.33	86.9	11.6
96	14.8	1	0.15	40.1	13.3
83	11.8	1	0.14	100.0	15.4
60	13.0	0	0.00	83.7	9.1
29	12.9	0	0.00	77.7	18.8
62	10.4	1	0.17	52.8	9.5
382	52.3	3	0.41	90.4	11.1
112	18.8	2	0.34	78.3	10.9
141	19.1	4	0.54	74.4	13.3
120	11.8	3	0.29	82.4	8.3
70	13.6	8	1.55	47.9	10.3
39	13.2	1	0.34	73.6	11.9
46	14.3	5	1.55	73.3	21.7
56	11.2	1	0.20	78.6	10.2
183	15.7	102	8.74	92.4	10.7
65	12.7	1	0.19	72.9	8.0

CHART CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS WHERE 30 PERCENT OR MORE OF STUDENTS ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT: School Year 2007-08 (Continued)**

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS			NUMBER OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT <sup>2</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT <sup>2</sup>
District	School Name	GRADES		
03	P.S. 076 A. PHILIP RANDOLPH	PK-5	117	30.0
09	P.S. 063 AUTHORS ACADEMY	PK-5	151	30.0
19	P.S. 065 THE LITTLE RED SCHOOL HOUSE	K-5	171	29.9
04	P.S. 146 ANN M. SHORT	PK-5	147	29.9
05	P.S. 175 HENRY H. GARNET	PK-5	107	29.9
17	P.S. 167 THE PARKWAY	PK-5	161	29.9
09	P.S. 126 DR MARJORIE H. DUNBAR	PK-6	239	29.7

**HYBRID ELEMENTARY/MIDDLE SCHOOLS WHERE 30 PERCENT OR MORE OF STUDENTS ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT: School Year 2007-08**

HYBRID ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS			NUMBER OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT <sup>2</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT <sup>2</sup>
District	School Name	GRADES		
23	P.S. 150 CHRISTOPHER	PK-8	300	51.0
23	P.S. 332 CHARLES H. HOUSTON	PK-8	268	48.8
21	P.S. 288 THE SHIRLEY TANYHILL	PK-8	233	43.2
27	P.S. 225 SEASIDE	PK-8	270	43.2
19	P.S. 328 PHYLLIS WHEATLEY	PK-8	257	42.3
23	P.S. 298 DR. BETTY SHABAZZ	PK-8	248	42.0
15	AGNES Y. HUMPHREY SCHOOL FOR LEADERSHIP	PK-10	239	41.9
30	P.S. 111 JACOB BLACKWELL	PK-7	155	40.2
23	P.S. 184 NEWPORT	PK-8	204	39.4
01	P.S. 188 THE ISLAND SCHOOL	PK-8	153	39.2
04	P.S. 050 VITO MARCANTONIO	K-8	206	39.1
23	P.S. 327 DR. ROSE B. ENGLISH	PK-8	292	38.9
27	P.S. 042 R. VERNAM	K-8	337	38.6
19	P.S. 306 ETHAN ALLEN	PK-8	259	38.0
19	P.S. 202 ERNEST S. JENKINS	PK-8	387	37.5
23	P.S. 284 LEW WALLACE	PK-8	249	37.3
01	P.S. 034 FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT	PK-8	154	36.8
23	P.S. 183 DANIEL CHAPPIE JAMES	PK-8	272	36.7
04	P.S. 096 JOSEPH LANZETTA	PK-8	234	36.6
10	P.S. 3 RAUL JULIA MICRO SOCIETY	PK-8	173	35.3
03	P.S. 149 SOJOURNER TRUTH	PK-8	166	34.9
23	P.S. 041 FRANCIS WHITE	K-8	275	34.9
09	P.S. M.S. 004 CROTONA PARK WEST	K-8	190	34.9
19	P.S. 072 ANNETTE P GOLDMAN	PK-7	278	34.8
23	P.S. I.S. 155 NICHOLAS HERKIMER	PK-8	215	34.4
27	P.S. 183 DR. RICHARD R. GREEN	PK-8	223	33.5
19	P.S. 174 DUMONT	PK-8	149	33.3
12	P.S. 212	PK-8	161	32.3
27	P.S. 105 THE BAY SCHOOL	PK-8	292	32.1
16	P.S. 308 CLARA CARDWELL	PK-8	264	32.1
11	P.S. 089 BRONX	PK-8	432	32.1
23	P.S. 137 RACHEL JEAN MITCHELL	PK-8	148	31.6
07	P.S. M.S. 029 MELROSE SCHOOL	PK-8	232	31.6
12	P.S. 211	PK-8	209	31.4
23	P.S. 073 THOMAS S. BOYLAND	PK-8	171	30.8
23	P.S. 165 IDA POSNER	PK-8	198	30.7
23	P.S. 178 SAINT CLAIR MCKELWAY	PK-8	190	30.2
04	P.S. 007 SAMUEL STERN	PK-8	129	29.9
03	P.S. 241 FAMILY ACADEMY	PK-8	111	29.9
17	P.S. 138 BROOKLYN	PK-8	292	29.8
07	P.S. 025 BILINGUAL SCHOOL	PK-8, no 6th	141	29.6

Chart sorted by highest percentage of chronically absent students

NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH AT LEAST ONE 407 ALERT <sup>3</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS WITH AT LEAST ONE 407 ALERT <sup>3</sup>	NUMBER OF CALLS TO STATE CENTRAL REGISTER FOR EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT <sup>3</sup>	NUMBER OF SCR CALLS PER 100 STUDENTS <sup>3</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS RECEIVING FREE LUNCH <sup>3,4</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION <sup>3,5</sup>
72	17.0	2	0.47	78.5	8.5
58	11.8	0	0.00	90.2	11.2
64	11.8	2	0.37	38.1	0.0
38	7.6	2	0.40	94.6	32.3
79	21.3	0	0.00	65.2	3.5
86	15.7	2	0.37	91.6	11.0
134	16.8	13	1.63	91.6	11.0

NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH AT LEAST ONE 407 ALERT <sup>3</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS WITH AT LEAST ONE 407 ALERT <sup>3</sup>	NUMBER OF CALLS TO STATE CENTRAL REGISTER FOR EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT <sup>3</sup>	NUMBER OF SCR CALLS PER 100 STUDENTS <sup>3</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS RECEIVING FREE LUNCH <sup>3,4</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION <sup>3,5</sup>
171	29.08	1	0.17	88.9	11.9
166	30.07	18	3.26	86.2	11.4
112	20.48	25	4.57	55.6	16.5
162	25.47	5	0.79	65.3	8.6
145	24.13	23	3.83	100.0	12.8
121	19.97	4	0.66	97.7	12.5
133	23.42	11	1.94	90.5	29.4
69	16.75	0	0.00	93.2	16.5
79	14.85	3	0.56	87.4	12.4
91	22.09	2	0.49	50.0	18.2
111	21.31	1	0.19	85.8	21.1
139	18.44	23	3.05	81.0	8.1
160	19.61	5	0.61	65.7	15.6
165	23.40	2	0.28	47.1	11.3
197	19.22	9	0.88	89.0	6.7
125	19.03	7	1.07	80.5	10.2
80	18.96	4	0.95	75.6	8.3
186	25.24	16	2.17	76.5	10.6
96	14.39	3	0.45	93.4	7.2
77	16.08	4	0.84	43.8	17.5
103	21.41	3	0.62	65.7	11.6
110	14.77	149	20.00	93.6	7.7
91	17.37	0	0.00	89.1	24.6
122	15.56	7	0.89	49.4	15.9
93	14.76	3	0.48	89.1	9.2
96	14.75	1	0.15	41.6	10.3
81	17.57	1	0.22	100.0	10.2
84	16.28	0	0.00	86.8	9.9
143	15.75	17	1.87	42.5	8.6
95	11.70	1	0.12	78.1	15.1
255	19.62	3	0.23	77.6	11.3
89	19.47	1	0.22	75.5	10.5
99	13.36	10	1.35	88.5	7.8
102	15.18	2	0.30	94.6	16.4
101	17.84	9	1.59	52.7	11.7
113	17.44	2	0.31	90.1	10.3
118	18.73	0	0.00	79.2	9.1
49	10.70	13	2.84	85.6	8.1
56	15.51	7	1.94	83.4	11.4
194	19.66	0	0.00	90.4	9.6
69	14.20	5	1.03	95.7	9.5

## MIDDLE SCHOOLS WHERE 30 PERCENT OR MORE OF STUDENTS ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT: *School Year 2007-08*

MIDDLE SCHOOLS			NUMBER OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT <sup>2</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT <sup>2</sup>
District	School Name	GRADES		
13	J.H.S. 117 FRANCIS SCOTT KEY	7-8	159	58.2
14	J.H.S. 049 WILLIAM J. GAYNOR	7-8	150	56.6
08	M.S. X201	6-8	243	54.0
04	J.H.S. M045 JOHN S. ROBERTS	6-8	225	48.9
08	M.S. 301 PAUL L. DUNBAR	6-8	181	48.1
23	I.S. 055 OCEAN HILL BROWNSVILLE	8	34	47.2
09	I.S. 313 SCHOOL OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT	6-8	212	47.2
13	SATELLITE EAST MIDDLE SCHOOL	6-8	114	46.5
07	M.S. 203	6-8	198	45.8
16	M.S. 267 MATH, SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY	6-8	210	45.8
05	ACADEMY OF COLLABORATIVE EDUCATION	6-8	103	45.4
12	BUSINESS SCHOOL FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL STUDIES	6-8	173	44.8
12	I.S. X318 MATH, SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY THROUGH ARTS	6-8	164	44.8
08	I.S. 174 EUGENE T. MALESKA	7-8	299	44.0
10	M.S. 399	6-8	331	43.3
08	J.H.S. 123 JAMES M. KIERAN	6-8	254	43.2
16	SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, FINANCE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP	6-8	141	43.1
16	M.S. 035 STEPHEN DECATUR	6-8	103	42.7
05	POWELL M.S. FOR LAW SOCIAL JUSTICE	7-8	117	42.7
09	BRONX WRITING ACADEMY	6-8	231	42.6
15	NEW HORIZONS SCHOOL	6-8	98	42.6
07	SOUTH BRONX ACADEMY FOR APPLIED MEDIA	6-8	120	42.6
16	J.H.S. 057 WHITELAW REID	6-8	127	42.3
04	J.H.S. 013 JACKIE ROBINSON	6-8	152	41.0
10	J.H.S. 080 THE MOSHOLU PARKWAY	6-8	288	40.9
13	M.S. 571	6-8	114	40.7
09	J.H.S. 166 ROBERTO CLEMENTE	5-8	390	40.4
14	URBAN ASSEMBLY SCHOOL FOR THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT	6-7	84	39.8
16	M.S. 143 PERFORMING FINE ARTS	8	46	39.7
14	J.H.S. 050 JOHN D. WELLS	6-8	280	39.4
03	J.H.S. M044 WILLIAM J. O'SHEA	6-8	164	39.2
13	J.H.S. 258 DAVID RUGGLES	7-8	109	39.2
10	M.S. 391	6-8	301	39.1
11	J.H.S. 144 MICHELANGELO	6-8	444	39.1
16	UPPER SCHOOL P.S. 25	6-8	99	39.0
13	KNOWLEDGE AND POWER PREPARATORY ACADEMY VII	6-8	30	38.5
04	TITO PUENTE EDUCATION COMPLEX	6-8	163	38.2
07	J.H.S. 151 LOU GEHRIG	6-8	112	38.0
09	I.S. 232	6-8	198	37.9
03	M.S. M246 CROSSROADS SCHOOL	6-8	87	37.7
09	I.S. 117 JOSEPH H. WADE	6-8	357	37.7
12	ACCION ACADEMY	6-8	74	37.6
12	SCHOOL OF PERFORMING ARTS	6-8	137	37.5
08	M.S. 302 LUISA DESSUS CRUZ	6-8	313	37.2
05	I.S. 195 ROBERTO CLEMENTE	6-8	294	37.2
19	J.H.S. 302 RAFAEL CORDERO	6-8	399	37.1
19	J.H.S. 218 JAMES P. SINNOTT	6-8	325	37.0
12	P.S. 129 TWIN PARKS UPPER	6-8	180	36.9
07	J.H.S. 162 LOLA RODRIGUEZ DE TIO	6-8	361	36.5
10	THE NEW SCHOOL FOR LEADERSHIP AND JOURNALISM	6-8	275	36.5
09	I.S. 219 NEW VENTURE SCHOOL	6-8	172	36.4
09	I.S. 339	6-8	338	36.4
13	SATELLITE WEST MIDDLE SCHOOL	6-8	100	36.4
12	I.S. 190	6-8	88	35.9
07	ACADEMY OF APPLIED MATHEMATICS AND TECHNOLOGY	6-8	100	35.8
09	I.S. 229 ROLAND PATTERSON	5-8	143	35.8
01	TECHNOLOGY, ARTS, AND SCIENCES STUDIO	6-8	81	35.7
17	MIDDLE SCHOOL FOR ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL EXCELLENCE	6-7	96	35.4
31	I.S. 49 BERTA A. DREYFUS	6-8	359	35.4
10	I.S. 254	6-8	164	34.9
27	I.S. 053 BRIAN PICCOLO	6-8	239	34.8
23	I.S. 271 JOHN M. COLEMAN	8	29	34.5
17	MIDDLE SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS	6-8	147	34.4
07	ACADEMY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS	6-8	103	34.1
12	J.H.S. 098 HERMAN RIDDER	6-8	162	33.9
32	J.H.S. 291 ROLAND HAYES	6-8	282	33.7
12	BRONX STUDIO SCHOOL FOR WRITERS AND ARTISTS	6-8	71	33.6

*All middle schools with grades 9 or above have been excluded  
Chart sorted by highest percentage of chronically absent students*

NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH AT LEAST ONE 407 ALERT <sup>3</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS WITH AT LEAST ONE 407 ALERT <sup>3</sup>	NUMBER OF CALLS TO STATE CENTRAL REGISTER FOR EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT <sup>3</sup>	NUMBER OF SCR CALLS PER 100 STUDENTS <sup>3</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS RECEIVING FREE LUNCH <sup>3,4</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION <sup>3,5</sup>
90	34.5	0	0.00	79.3	25.7
99	39.3	17	6.75	58.3	11.1
153	35.9	34	7.98	90.1	22.3
114	26.0	16	3.65	89.5	14.2
86	24.0	2	0.56	90.5	15.9
22	35.5	7	11.29	91.9	17.7
108	25.6	7	1.66	84.8	6.2
53	23.1	1	0.44	77.3	9.6
116	27.8	17	4.07	45.2	14.8
247	57.3	17	3.94	96.8	18.3
86	39.3	2	0.91	79.5	5.5
80	22.1	0	0.00	87.0	17.4
105	30.4	16	4.64	95.9	8.7
143	22.2	5	0.78	65.7	19.8
171	23.5	6	0.82	50.6	10.6
111	19.5	48	8.44	87.3	14.9
77	25.7	9	3.00	99.3	16.7
46	19.7	5	2.14	79.9	14.1
134	50.6	6	2.26	68.7	19.2
131	25.1	6	1.15	83.7	7.3
45	20.3	2	0.90	67.6	36.5
66	24.5	3	1.12	81.8	12.6
61	21.3	4	1.40	87.1	10.5
92	27.1	5	1.47	75.0	16.5
175	26.0	9	1.34	81.7	16.1
64	23.7	4	1.48	81.5	9.3
198	21.3	10	1.08	93.9	14.6
48	25.3	7	3.68	78.4	5.8
62	57.4	0	0.00	86.1	13.0
165	23.7	0	0.00	98.3	7.6
91	22.6	7	1.74	64.9	16.4
72	27.0	6	2.25	73.0	12.4
164	22.2	13	1.76	83.6	15.2
255	23.3	29	2.65	27.2	15.1
123	52.3	5	2.13	72.8	13.2
16	20.8	1	1.30	85.7	0.0
70	16.9	4	0.97	92.0	17.2
59	20.7	16	5.61	87.7	15.1
106	21.3	14	2.81	94.4	13.7
49	22.2	4	1.81	71.5	9.5
172	18.7	1	0.11	47.8	9.9
40	21.1	3	1.58	68.9	10.5
42	12.1	0	0.00	86.2	15.3
164	20.1	2	0.25	92.2	15.6
130	17.3	21	2.79	82.8	14.4
189	18.4	10	0.98	92.3	9.2
177	20.6	3	0.35	77.4	10.6
92	19.5	8	1.70	49.7	12.7
132	13.9	9	0.95	82.2	12.5
138	19.3	6	0.84	85.8	11.2
113	25.3	12	2.69	85.9	13.2
213	24.2	0	0.00	80.7	16.6
48	17.9	1	0.37	80.6	8.2
50	21.4	6	2.56	80.3	21.8
49	17.9	4	1.47	93.0	11.0
91	24.0	4	1.06	81.3	16.4
50	23.8	5	2.38	56.7	11.9
70	28.3	3	1.21	78.5	16.6
205	21.1	45	4.62	72.3	13.9
80	17.8	2	0.45	95.3	12.5
123	19.0	22	3.40	84.3	13.0
17	21.3	4	5.00	100.0	18.8
87	22.0	10	2.53	87.9	15.4
44	15.3	1	0.35	92.7	12.5
88	19.3	6	1.31	95.8	14.7
141	17.6	12	1.50	94.1	10.9
28	13.5	4	1.92	84.1	7.2

CHART CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

**MIDDLE SCHOOLS WHERE 30 PERCENT OR MORE OF STUDENTS ARE CHRONICALLY ABSENT: School Year 2007-08 (Continued)**

MIDDLE SCHOOLS			NUMBER OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT <sup>2</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS CHRONICALLY ABSENT <sup>2</sup>
District	School Name	GRADES		
07	P.S. I.S. 224	6-8	121	33.6
12	FANNIE LOU HAMER MIDDLE SCHOOL	6-8	89	33.6
17	M.S. 246 WALT WHITMAN	6-8	270	33.4
11	J.H.S. 135 FRANK D. WHALEN	7-8	118	33.0
32	I.S. 347 SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES	6-8	182	32.9
08	J.H.S. 131 ALBERT EINSTEIN	5-8	294	32.8
08	THE BRONX MATHEMATICS PREPARATORY SCHOOL	6-8	46	32.6
32	I.S. 349 MATH, SCIENCE TECH.	6-8	178	32.2
31	I.S. R002 GEORGE L. EGBERT	6-8	314	32.2
14	JOHN ERICSSON MIDDLE SCHOOL 126	6-8	200	31.9
08	I.S. 192 PIAGENTINI JONES	7-8	215	31.9
30	ALBERT SHANKER SCHOOL FOR VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS	6-8	211	31.9
31	I.S. 051 EDWIN MARKHAM	6-8	391	31.9
22	J.H.S. 014 SHELL BANK	6-8	243	31.9
10	M.S. 390	5-8	176	31.7
19	J.H.S. 166 GEORGE GERSHWIN	6-8	188	31.7
03	M.S. 256 ACADEMIC ATHLETIC EXCELLENCE	6-8	58	31.5
14	M.S. 582	6-8	98	31.4
19	I.S. 171 ABRAHAM LINCOLN	5-8	298	31.3
27	J.H.S. 226 VIRGIL I. GRISSOM	6-8	550	31.2
31	I.S. 027 ANNING S. PRALL	6-8	300	31.2
11	THE FORWARD SCHOOL	6-8	112	31.0
11	GLOBE SCHOOL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH	6-7	183	30.8
06	M.S. 326 WRITERS TODAY LEADERS TOMORROW	6-8	150	30.7
10	J.H.S. 118 WILLIAM W. NILES	6-8	354	30.3
19	J.H.S. 292 MARGARET S. DOUGLAS	6-8	242	30.3
17	M.S. 061 GLADSTONE H. ATWELL	6-8	305	30.2
27	J.H.S. 202 ROBERT H. GODDARD	6-8	362	30.0
01	UNIVERSITY NEIGHBORHOOD MIDDLE SCHOOL	6-8	85	29.8
09	NEW MILLENNIUM BUSINESS ACADEMY MIDDLE SCHOOL	6-8	83	29.7

SOURCE: New York City Department of Education, requested data run from ATS, July 2008

NOTES TO PAGES 38 TO 47: These charts incorporate data from two comparable student attendance datasets, both run after year close of the 2007-08 school year. There were marginal differences in the number of students reported in each dataset. Districts 75 and 79 excluded. Charter schools excluded.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS WITH AT LEAST ONE 407 ALERT <sup>3</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS WITH AT LEAST ONE 407 ALERT <sup>3</sup>	NUMBER OF CALLS TO STATE CENTRAL REGISTER FOR EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT <sup>3</sup>	NUMBER OF SCR CALLS PER 100 STUDENTS <sup>3</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS RECEIVING FREE LUNCH <sup>3,4</sup>	PERCENT OF STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION <sup>3,5</sup>
63	18.1	0	0.00	93.1	10.0
34	13.1	8	3.08	83.5	17.7
206	26.3	14	1.79	31.5	15.7
48	14.1	1	0.29	34.1	13.2
57	10.5	2	0.37	91.3	11.8
153	17.5	2	0.23	72.2	13.8
20	15.6	1	0.78	75.0	16.4
81	15.2	5	0.94	91.0	7.1
120	12.6	5	0.53	45.1	11.5
84	14.1	0	0.00	100.0	10.4
131	20.8	10	1.59	65.2	19.9
144	22.6	1	0.16	82.8	16.6
164	13.7	6	0.50	61.3	11.0
139	18.6	2	0.27	75.5	19.7
92	17.8	3	0.58	91.5	11.8
107	19.0	3	0.53	86.7	17.1
53	30.5	3	1.72	70.7	10.9
52	16.9	1	0.33	44.6	10.1
165	18.7	6	0.68	88.6	6.8
313	18.7	23	1.38	15.8	9.5
146	15.5	0	0.00	55.5	19.9
73	20.9	0	0.00	72.2	8.9
98	17.1	0	0.00	82.5	5.1
81	17.5	15	3.23	85.8	7.1
219	19.3	43	3.79	81.9	7.5
115	15.2	9	1.19	78.8	9.7
147	15.2	8	0.82	83.3	10.7
158	13.4	0	0.00	46.6	8.7
42	15.1	1	0.36	84.2	9.0
60	23.3	5	1.95	77.0	12.1

**FOOTNOTES TO PAGES 38 TO 47:** 1. Chronically absent is defined as missing more than 10 percent of the school year. In New York City, this is approximately 20 days or more of school.

2. From Individual Student Attendance Data Set: Data was obtained using each student's universal identifier number, assuring that their absences would be tracked properly if they changed schools within the school year.

3. From School Based 407 Alert Data Set: Data was obtained from the Department of Education's "Form 407" attendance alert system.

4. Percentages refer to the percentage of students who receive a free lunch. Students who receive reduced price lunches are not included in this figure.

5. Many special education students are bused to school. This can affect attendance rates.

*A Hidden Problem (continued from page 15)*

full time caseworker who speaks three African dialects and who could help overcome a multitude of cultural misunderstandings. The school's attendance rose from about 89 percent in 2005 to more than 93 percent in 2007–08, one of the best in the district and in line with the citywide average. Torres thinks he will be able to reach 95 percent, close to the rate that schools achieve in suburban communities. While it may be impossible to get the stratospheric attendance that schools in high-income neighborhoods enjoy, he says, that's no reason not to try.

"It's really about making a commitment that you want attendance to improve," he says. "People say there is nothing we can do about attendance. That's nonsense." Again invoking his family, he mentions that his dad was a community organizer and was never afraid to ask people for help. "What happens with a lot of principals is that their own egos hold them back," Torres says. "But you can do this with community-based organizations or with resources you have in the building. You would be surprised." Watching his daily student numbers climb, against all odds, has been a victory, he says. "That's the reward I receive." ❖

*Offering More Than Academics (continued from page 37)*

in the near term, as the state deals with an economic recession. Officials at the Children's Aid Society emphasize that schools could benefit from existing services already provided by other city and state agencies—ensuring that more children and families have access to them.

There is a possibility of more state money over the long term. Litigator Michael Rebell, who led the Campaign for Fiscal Equity's successful lawsuit to equalize state education funding, has launched a new project, the Campaign for Educational Equity, to fight for the extra social supports needed to put the state's poor students on the same footing as their richer counterparts. His group includes the author Richard Rothstein, who has documented the myriad ways that poor children fall behind, and is the intellectual light of the national "broader, bolder" coalition pressing for more services to close the achievement gap.

Rebell says he hopes that the state legislature and the governor will see the wisdom of these programs, even in these tight budget years. If not, he says, he is not afraid to sue. "I am not shy about saying if we need a few billion more to do this right, we will come up with a constitutional right of why it's going to be done." ❖

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## ABOUT THIS REPORT

Last year, more than 90,000 children in grades K through 5 in New York City's public schools—or 20 percent of enrollment—missed at least one month of school. In high-poverty neighborhoods, the number was far higher, approaching one-third of primary grade students. The implication for these students' long-term success is enormous—but that's only part of the story. This report describes how chronic absenteeism at an early age is often a signal of serious problems at home, and how strong partnerships between public schools, community organizations and other institutions can make a significant difference.

In many neighborhoods, the challenges of child and family poverty are immense. Addressing these issues directly, alongside absenteeism, may not only improve school success in the long-term, but also strengthen families and improve the quality of children's lives. A targeted approach to addressing chronic absenteeism and family instability in 100 city schools could establish a formidable structure for strengthening schools by strengthening families.

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