Chronic Absenteeism v. Truancy: Best Practices in Supporting Homeless Student Attendance

Webinar \ February 12, 2020
1:00PM - 2:15PM EST
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Education Leads Home: A National Campaign Building Stronger Futures for Homeless Students

- Young children will participate in quality early childhood programs at the same rate as their housed peers by 2026.
- High school students will reach a 90 percent graduation rate by 2030.
- Post-secondary students will reach a 60 percent post-secondary attainment rate by 2034.

www.educationleadshome.org
About Education Leads Home

ICPH
ICPH is a New York City-based policy research organization focused on family homelessness in New York City and throughout the United States. www.icphusa.org

SCHOOLHOUSE CONNECTION
SchoolHouse Connection is a national organization working to overcome homelessness through education. www.schoolhouseconnection.org

CIVIC
Civic is a public policy and strategy firm that helps corporations, nonprofits, foundations, universities, and governments develop and spearhead innovative public policies to strengthen our communities and country. www.civicenterprises.net

AMERICA'S PROMISE ALLIANCE
APA is the nation's largest partnership of its kind, bringing together hundreds of national nonprofits, businesses, communities, educators, and ordinary citizens behind the idea of making the promise of America accessible to all young people. www.americaspromise.org

EDUCATION COUNSEL
EducationCounsel is a mission-based education consulting firm that combines significant experience in policy, strategy, law and advocacy to drive improvements in the U.S. education system from early childhood through postsecondary education. http://educationcounsel.com/
EDUCATION LEADS HOME 2021:
A NATIONAL CONVENING ON STUDENT HOMELESSNESS

SAVE THE DATE

FEBRUARY 1-2, 2021 | AUSTIN, TEXAS

EDUCATIONLEADSHOME.ORG/2021-CONVENING
Our Presenters

**Tina Giarla**
2011 SchoolHouse Connection Scholar and Program Director, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless

**Tamara Vaughn-Walker**
Juvenile Justice Council Coordinator, St. Clair County State’s Attorney’s Office, Illinois

**Rose Taphouse**
Lansing School District Student Services Coordinator, Lansing School District, Michigan

**Katie Brown**
Program Manager, Education Leads Home - SchoolHouse Connection
Today’s Agenda

- Introduction
- Describing the Difference Between Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy
- Overview of Chronic Absenteeism and its Effects on Students
- Case Study: Lansing, MI
- Youth Perspective: Tina Giarla
- Case Study: St. Clair County, IL
- Q&A
Overview of Chronic Absenteeism

What is Chronic Absenteeism?

Students who miss 10 percent or more of days enrolled are defined as chronically absent—including both excused and unexcused absences.

Why Does Chronic Absenteeism Matter?

- Less likely to meet grade level proficiency standards
- More likely to drop out of school
- Absences in early grades have lasting impact

How is Chronic Absenteeism a Warning Sign?

When students consistently miss school, it is often a sign of underlying challenges and may signal a student is experiencing homelessness.
National Chronic Absenteeism Data

The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) released student absenteeism rates from all 50 states for the 2015-16 school year. This data from all public schools and school districts shows that almost 8 million students were chronically absent from schools in 2015-16.
Chronic Absenteeism and Students Experiencing Homelessness

Of these 8 million students, unsurprisingly, research shows that economically disadvantaged students are more likely to be chronically absent than the overall student population—but studies also indicate that students experiencing homelessness are chronically absent at rates even higher than their housed, low-income peers.
Rose Taphouse
Lansing School District Student Services Coordinator, Lansing School District, Michigan
Why are homeless students missing so much school even after receiving McKinney-Vento services?
Parents prioritizing meeting basic needs over school

Do not receive or delayed special education services until 3rd grade

Experience 4 times more trauma

Increased risk of being a victim of the streets, domestic abuse, human trafficking, etc.

Less access to medical, mental, vision, and dental care

It’s a little complicated--and so are the solutions!

More days absent due to not being able to get to school

More days lost due to disconnect from the school and peers

More days absent due to illness

More days absent due to suspensions

Missing days to bullying

Less access to medical, mental, vision, and dental care

Do not receive or delayed special education services until 3rd grade

Reduce access to basic needs, such as food, winter clothing, transportation, etc.

Experience 4 times more trauma

Increased risk of being a victim of the streets, domestic abuse, human trafficking, etc.
What can we do to assist?

Absent due to illness

• Chronic health issues like asthma and diabetes require continuous medical care and sometimes medication; refer parents to school nurses if available
• Connect parents to community health resources, such as your local county health or mental health department
• Consider 504 plan or special education evaluation if necessary

Absent due to suspensions

• Conduct a trauma assessment using trauma screeners
• Refer to your community mental health department
• Refer to district mental health resources
• Conduct academic assessments; look at grades, aptitude test scores, reading levels
Absent due to bullying issues

- Share district board policy and student handbook information that addresses bullying issues with parents
- Follow district and board policy as it pertains to bullying issues
- Be persistent with following up with students and parents who report bullying issues with their child
- Share with parents that if they keep their child out of school for bullying issues, they are hurting their child even further

Absent due to not being able to get to school

- Get creative with transportation options provided by your district
- Purchase or lease family-sized passenger vans and hire drivers to drive them
- Collaborate with other districts to see what they may have available
- Be flexible, especially when students are at different locations every other night
- Ask parents what ideas and resources they may have if you provide funds to cover creative transportation options
- Explore funding sources outside of normal district funds to pay for car repair, driver’s license fees, and/or insurance costs for parent
Absent due to disconnect from school and peers

- Create school environments that are welcoming by using trauma-based models
- Before school starts in the fall, visit every one of your student’s homes
- Use district data to identify all students in your building who may be missing too much school early on
- Reach out to parents and students as soon as students show signs of poor attendance
- Use staff or older students to mentor students with attendance issues
- Create incentive-based programs for improved attendance—do not forget to include parents

- Create teams of staff to follow up and work with students with attendance issues; include:
  - Principals
  - Counselors
  - School nurses
  - Public safety
  - Athletic or academic coaches
  - Teachers
  - Central administrative staff who may be working on school improvement issues such as homeless liaisons, foster care liaisons, attendance specialists, Title I and at-risk coordinators, etc.
F.O.R.T. Student Success Plan
Implementing the Success Plan

- **Conduct an initial assessment** for the identified F.O.R.T. students enrolled in your building, which includes the following:
  - Review academics, behavior, attendance, and mobility rates for each identified F.O.R.T. student
  - Meet with the student
  - Complete the trauma survey with parent or caretaker
  - Complete assessment results form
- Meet with the F.O.R.T. student **monthly** (in person)
- Meet with the parent/caretaker of the F.O.R.T. student (in person or by phone)
- **Make appropriate referrals** to services that will provide supports as needed for F.O.R.T. students
- Maintain a file with the assessment, survey, and log paperwork for the building
- Send the file to the F.O.R.T. Program at the end of the academic year
F.O.R.T. Student Success - Time and Effort Log

Student Name: ___________________________  SSS: ___________________________  School: ___________________________  Grade: ________

Initial Assessment Date: _____________

☐ Reviewed attendance for last year
☐ Reviewed attendance for this year
☐ Reviewed test scores or grades from last year
☐ Reviewed test scores or grades this year
☐ Reviewed behavior
☐ Conducted Distress screener with parent-guardian
☐ Observed students appearance (i.e.: looked at shoes to see if the fit and are in good condition, observe students personal hygiene, etc.)
☐ If student is a senior inquire about college plans and financial aid and if there are other needs such as cap and gown

Referrals made based on assessment

☐ Tutoring
☐ Counseling services- CMH or school grant
☐ Other Title 1 programs
☐ School Nurse
☐ Other school programs or activities
☐ F.O.R.T. Program for additional needs such as gym shoes, cap and gown, or personal hygiene needs- concerns etc.
☐ Post-secondary counselor-advisor

Monthly Follow-up log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date meet with student</th>
<th>Activity - reviewed academics, attendance, follow up on referrals, current nighttime status, additional needs, etc.</th>
<th>Additional comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
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Trauma Assessment

Distress Screener*

Student Name: [ ] Language: Click here to enter text.
School: Choose an item. Grade: Choose an item.
Parent Name: Date: Click here to enter a date.
Speaks English: Choose an item. Understands English: Choose an item.

Please rate the following areas for your child:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>NOT AT ALL</th>
<th>A LITTLE BIT</th>
<th>MODERATELY</th>
<th>QUITE A BIT</th>
<th>EXTREMELY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problems eating (not related to change in diet)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems sleeping (too much, not sleeping, restless sleep)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscle, bone, joint pain</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headaches, stomachaches</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed off to others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gets mad easily</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervousness/shakiness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Startled easily/jumpy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cries easily</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toileting issues</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Score

Please respond to these areas within the past month:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does your child want to hurt him/herself?</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does your child want to hurt others?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your child physically act out? (kicking, punching, biting, throwing, etc)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Score

Additional Information:
Distress Screener Scoring

Box 1 (Symptoms) Total score

Tier 1: (Score less than 15) - The child may experience occasional distress, however the child is functioning well, symptoms do not interfere with functioning at home, school, or in social situations and child reports overall good mood most days. Tier 1 supports in the classroom may reduce concerns of distress.

Tier 2: (Score between 15-25) - The child is experiencing some levels of distress, symptoms seem to be interfering with functioning at home, school, work, or in social relationships. Tier 2 supports (Cultural Brokers and Student Support Specialists) can assist the student with needed resources. This may include group support, afterschool activities, buddy system, mentoring.

Tier 3: (Scores between 25-40) - The child is experiencing acute or severe symptoms of emotional distress or behavioral dysregulation including risky behaviors. Symptoms are severely interfering with functioning at home, work, school, with peers; unable to attend school or develop appropriate social relationships; difficulties completing basic tasks, etc. Tier 3 supports (more intensive services) might include: counseling services for the student and/or family, emergency services, group support, weekly check ins, etc.

Box 2

If any of the following questions score 1-2, refer to Tier 2 supports

If any of the following questions score a 3-4, refer to Tier 3 supports

*This tool was adapted from 2011 Pathways to Wellness: Integrating Refugee Health and Wellbeing, Refugee Health Screener (RHS-15)
If students need services, to whom do I refer them?

- **Tutoring**: provided at most buildings and at the Capital Area Library and may be provided through the F.O.R.T. Program
- **Mental Health**: contact CMH, Gateway services, Child and Family Services and, if applicable, Project Peace
- **Medical, optical, and dental**: contact your school nurse or email Rose Taphouse
- **Transportation to and from school**: email Rose Taphouse or Pam Davis
- **Senior expenses**: for FASFA assistance, contact the college advisor at the student’s high school or their counselor
- **Food assistance**: check with your school to see if they are part of the weekend backpack program (if available at your school), start a small food pantry at your school and/or seek community resources
- **Clothing, school supplies, personal hygiene supplies, some bedding, and other similar items**: email Rose Taphouse or Pam Davis
- **Housing**: parent needs to contact the Coordinated Point of Entry (VOA-HARA) or, for unaccompanied youth, call the Gateway Crisis line 1-877-833-3689 (24 hours) or call 211
Pushing Past Adversity: A Youth Perspective
Why is education important to you?

Furthering your education in whatever it is you have already obtained will never harm you. I used my street savviness all the time, such as my intuition, my people-reading skills, and my ability to achieve my goals using often “non-traditional” means. But in a society that heavily relies on a completed education as a nonnegotiable, I am grateful that I have a higher education. I have witnessed doors being slammed shut in the faces of young adults who are tirelessly fighting for a chance—and just because they have not had the same educational experience as others, the opportunity does not even exist for them to prove themselves an asset.
In your experience, what are some of the most common causes of chronic absence or truancy for students experiencing homelessness?

→ In my experience, transportation was a leading cause as well as not having clean or adequate clothing.

→ When you’re young, your peers can be ruthless and are often lacking empathy, so it is hard to look past the superficiality of new, hip (or even just clean) clothes and shoes, and having squeaky clean hygiene.
Can you please share examples of how educators helped you while you were experiencing chronic absence and homelessness?

During different periods of my life, educators dished out whatever they could: rides, meals, clothing, love, lots of guidance, an excused absence/tardy, and, at the most trying times, even a safe home.
What do you wish teachers or other people at school had done to help you while you were experiencing homelessness?

I wish there was an educational service or even an orientation that outlined the services the school/district provided. It was challenging to discuss the services I needed because I did not know what even existed to help me.

Educators should continue to work toward removing the stigma of asking for help for whatever services a student needs. School should be a safe haven or even an access point for students in need or in crisis. I know there are still barriers in the way of under-age youth accessing certain programs, but there should be a clear path for a student to take at school, should they need crisis intervention or information about resources they or their families could potentially access.
What words of wisdom do you have for practitioners and students who want to advocate for themselves and their peers?

➔ Adversity differs person to person. All that anyone needs to remember is that tomorrow is a brand-new day and, as long as your feet and your head are facing forward, you continue pushing yourself that way, too.

➔ Listen to your instincts.

➔ You are your best advocate.

➔ Do not take no for an answer. There is ALWAYS something that can be done.
Addressing Chronic Truancy in St. Clair County, IL

Tamara Vaughn-Walker
Coordinator, Juvenile Justice Council
St. Clair County State’s Attorney’s Office
Poor School Attendance Linked to...

- Increased Drop Out Rates
- Inability to Earn a Living Wage
- Juvenile Delinquency and Incarceration
- Poor Health Outcomes (e.g. substance use, mental health issues, etc.)
The St. Clair County Juvenile Justice Council was established in 2011. Since then, community stakeholders have been working to improve outcomes for youth.

Active Members include:

• Legal personnel
• Juvenile Justice
• Child Welfare
• Education
• Healthcare
• Parent Advocacy Groups
• Faith Communities
• Youth-Serving Organizations
• After-School Providers
Steps We’ve Taken...

• St. Clair County established a Truancy Review Board in collaboration with school districts to mitigate attendance issues

• The review board has representation from:
  – St. Clair County Regional Office of Education
  – St. Clair County State’s Attorney’s Office
  – Housing
  – Community Health Organizations
  – Local Community College
Issues Contributing to Truancy

- Housing Instability
- Transportation Barriers
- Cultural Differences
- Child or Parent Health Challenges
- Poor Communication
- IEPs/504 Plan Accommodations
Efforts to Support Students Experiencing Homelessness

- Implementing Student-Based Health Services
- Onsite Washers and Dryers
- Food/Clothing Pantries
- Increasing Community Collaboration
- Creating Safe Spaces as Students, Families Disclose
- Ongoing Professional Development

Positive Youth Outcomes
Transportation Bill

Policy Advocacy to Improve Transportation

East St. Louis, Illinois – Parents United for Change advocated for HB 5195
• Through their advocacy, HB 5195 was signed into Illinois law in 2018 to allow free transportation to students who live in high-crime areas within 1.5 miles of their school.
• In December 2019, Parents United for Change were awarded the Governor’s Hometown Award.
Q&A
Tools to improve the attendance of students experiencing homelessness

www.schoolhouseconnection.org/attendance-tools
Upcoming Webinars

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey as an Advocacy Tool
\ Wednesday, February 19, 2020, 1:00 – 2:15PM ET \ Register Now

FERPA and Students Experiencing Homelessness
\ Wednesday, April 22, 2020, 2:00 – 3:15PM ET \ Register Now

Undocumented Students Experiencing Homelessness
\ Tuesday, April 28, 2020, 3:00 – 4:15PM ET \ Register Now
Resources

SchoolHouse Connection:  
http://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/

Education Leads Home:  
http://www.educationleadshome.org

National Center on Homeless Education:  
https://nche.ed.gov

Check & Connect  
http://checkandconnect.umn.edu/

Attendance Works:  
https://www.attendanceworks.org/

Everyone Graduates Center:  
http://every1graduates.org/
Contact Information

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