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The Relationship Between 3rd Grade ELA & K-5 Chronic Absenteeism in Troy

Introduction

Recently, as Troy has considered a new K-5 Writing curriculum, several parents and community members have raised concerns at board meetings and online about Troy's performance on state standardized assessments, specifically 3rd Grade ELA M-STEP (G3 ELA) proficiency rates. This original research brief investigates Troy's academic achievement on pre- and post-COVID M-STEP performance with special focus on 3rd grade. In addition, this research brief examines Troy's pre- and post-COVID K-5 Chronic Absenteeism rates (K-5 CA).[1,2]

Specifically, this research brief presents G3 ELA and K-5 CA in Troy for three pre-COVID years (Year End 2017 [YE17][3], YE18, and YE19) and three post-COVID years (YE22, YE23, and YE24). Data are analyzed at both the district- and school-levels and shown in Tables 1 and 2 on the following pages.[4] Key take-aways include:

- G3 ELA scores fell from a pre-COVID average of 72.1% to 66.1%
    - For a cohort of (815) 3rd graders, a 6.0 pp decrease equates to **approximately 49 students who are Not Proficient on M-STEP**
    - This 6.0 pp decline is statistically significant
    - However, **the post-COVID trend is not statistically significant**
    - Moreover, other M-STEP tested grades **(Grades 4-7) show relatively stable performance in the post-COVID period**, albeit the decline from pre- to post-COVID is statistically significant

[1] Chronic Absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more school days for any reason, so in a 180-day school year, 18 or more days.
[2] Ideally, the most relevant measure would be K-3 Chronic Absenteeism; however, because of how the data are aggregated by the state, K-5 is more readily available. Note that K-3 Chronic Absenteeism is higher than Grades 4-5, so there is attenuation bias.
[3] YE17 references to the 2016-17 school year.
[4] Please note that at the June 17, 2025 board meeting, I cited district-level statistics for all grades; however, for this analysis, I focused on K-5 only in this research brief, the statistics in this report are slightly different than my public comment.

    - **This decrease in TSD (-6.0 pp) is worse than what was observed across both the state (-3.8 pp) and county (-2.8 pp)**; these differences are statistically significant
    - There is considerable variation across TSD schools both prior to COVID (min of 52.2% to a max of 86.7%) and after (41.5% to 78.0%, respectively)

- K-5 CA rose from an average of 6.1% pre-COVID to 16.9% post-COVID
    - For a cohort of (815) 3rd graders, a 10.8 percentage point (pp) increase equates to **approximately 88 additional chronically absent students**
    - The 10.8 pp increase is statistically significant
    - This increase in TSD (+10.8 pp) was slightly worse than what was observed across both the state of Michigan (+14.5 pp) and Oakland County (+13.7 pp); these differences are statistically significant
    - It should be noted that **chronic absenteeism rates have been improving in the post COVID period** (21.8% in YE22, 15.9% in YE23, and 12.8% in YE24); however, continued progress is necessary to return to pre-COVID levels
    - While TSD saw a smaller percentage point increase compared to the state and county, **the District's probability increase (2.77 times) — calculated as post average divided by pre average — exceeded that of the state (1.93 times) and county (1.79 times)**

Please note that **this research brief does not take a strong position on either the recently adopted K-5 Writing curriculum or Lucy Caulkins more generally**.[5] Only that the evidence cited by some parents community members against the curricula may not be statistically valid.

Descriptive Analysis: 3rd Grade ELA M-STEP (G3 ELA)

At least two claims have been made regarding Troy's G3 ELA in public comments at both recent Troy school board meetings and various online platforms:

1. G3 ELA scores have steadily declined since the return to in-person learning in YE22
2. This trend is due to the K-5 literacy and writing curricula

[5] For what it's worth, I am personally agnostic on whether the board should have adopted the K-5 Writing curriculum for YE26; I have concerns about the curricular strategy of separate curricula for literacy and writing and I am skeptical of Lucy Caulkins generally. However, this analysis does not directly relate to those positions.

Table 1: 3rd Grade ELA M-STEP Over Time by School

	3RD GRADE ELA M-STEP (ALL STUDENTS)								
	Pre-COVID			Post-COVID			Comparisons		
Elementary Schools	YE17	YE18	YE19	YE22	YE23	YE24	Pre-COVID Average	Post-COVID Average	Pre vs Post
Barnard Elementary	59.8%	61.1%	76.6%	65.3%	64.2%	54.7%	65.7%	61.2%	(4.5)
Bemis Elementary	84.4%	88.1%	87.8%	82.9%	72.3%	72.2%	86.7%	75.6%	(11.0)
Costello Elementary	63.5%	87.0%	67.2%	71.9%	62.5%	76.7%	71.5%	70.3%	(1.2)
Hamilton Elementary	78.7%	67.9%	76.3%	74.6%	81.3%	64.8%	74.4%	73.3%	(1.1)
Hill Elementary	77.6%	68.0%	66.7%	50.0%	51.7%	50.0%	70.4%	50.6%	(19.9)
Leonard Elementary	84.7%	87.9%	80.0%	81.0%	77.9%	75.4%	83.8%	78.0%	(5.8)
Martell Elementary	71.6%	73.0%	70.7%	68.7%	58.6%	70.8%	71.7%	65.4%	(6.3)
Morse Elementary	58.8%	55.8%	45.3%	39.1%	48.3%	38.0%	53.8%	41.5%	(12.3)
Schroeder Elementary	74.7%	84.4%	81.3%	72.6%	69.6%	69.9%	80.1%	70.8%	(9.3)
Troy Union Elementary	43.4%	56.4%	57.1%	60.0%	56.1%	59.4%	52.2%	58.5%	6.3
Wass Elementary	85.3%	79.7%	87.1%	82.7%	74.6%	66.7%	84.3%	74.9%	(9.4)
Wattles Elementary	51.2%	72.0%	79.7%	71.9%	70.1%	59.1%	66.8%	67.0%	0.2
K-5 Troy Schools	**69.5%**	**72.8%**	**74.0%**	**69.1%**	**65.9%**	**63.2%**	**72.1%**	**66.1%**	(6.0)
Oakland County	51.1%	52.2%	53.3%	51.4%	49.2%	47.5%	52.2%	49.4%	(2.8)
State of Michigan	44.1%	44.4%	45.1%	41.6%	40.9%	39.6%	44.5%	40.7%	(3.8)

Source: MISchoolData.org

Claim #1: Is there a declining post-COVID trend?

The differences between the pre- and post-COVID averages are striking: a 6.0 pp decline. Similarly, the post-COVID scores appear to have steadily declined. A reasonable person might also identify what appears to be another trend in the post-COVID period.

However, this is a specious interpretation of the post-COVID data. To understand why that is, you must consider what statisticians call "**confidence intervals**" surrounding every year's proficiency rate. That is, there is some imprecision in the assessment of each student and thus there is some margin of error to consider when the aggregation of scores at either the district- or school-levels.

Table 2: Statistical Confidence Limits by Year for 3rd Grade ELA M-STEP

Year	Proficiency Rate	Number of Students Tested	Lower 95% Confidence Limit	Upper 95% Confidence Limit
YE17	69.5%	925	66.5%	72.4%
YE18	72.8%	831	69.7%	75.7%
YE19	74.0%	903	71.0%	76.7%
YE20	Not administered because of COVID			
YE21	Optional test year because of COVID (virtual year)			
YE22	69.1%	824	65.8%	72.1%
YE23	65.9%	813	62.6%	69.1%
YE24	63.2%	816	59.9%	66.5%
Pre-COVID Average	72.1%	2659	70.3%	73.7%
Post-COVID Average	66.1%	2453	64.2%	67.9%

As you can see, for all individual years (i.e., both YE17-YE19 and YE22-YE24) there is some overlap between the confidence intervals of the adjacent years. Therefore, what may appear to be a trend of **declines in the post-COVID years (i.e., 69.1% to 65.9% to 63.2%) is <u>not</u> a true trend in a statistical sense** since the lower 95% confidence limit of YE22 (65.8%) overlaps with the upper 95% confidence limit of YE24 (66.5%).

However, what we can conclude is that **the pre-COVID average (72.1%) is statistically different from the post-COVID average (66.1%)** because the lower 95% confidence limit of the pre-COVID average (70.3%) does not overlap with the upper 95% confidence limit of the post-COVID average (67.9%).

Therefore, while these data support the conclusion that G3 ELA scores have statistically declined pre-COVID versus post-COVID, it is not accurate to say that G3 ELA scores have

been in secular decline between YE22 to YE24, despite superficial appearance of a trend. The former represents what is often referred to as "signal" while the latter represents "noise."

Claim #2: The G3 ELA Decline is Due to Troy's ELA Curriculum

Having established that there is in fact no negative post-COVID secular trend in a statistical sense, the premise of Claim 2 is undermined. Moreover, the curriculum did not change between YE19 (last pre-COVID year) and YE22 (first post-COVID year). So logically **it does not make sense to look towards the curriculum even if there was a statistical post-COVID decline**.

This research brief will examine one explanation—an increase in K-5 Chronic Abenteeism—shortly. But it is worth a moment to admire the problem of the YE24 3rd grade cohort. Educational researchers often study what are called "**cohort effects**," which means that some differences observed in time series data are due to a common shock experienced by a cohort rather than an increase or decline in a measure. For example, educational attainment by men during the years of the draft for the Vietnam War is a classic example of a cohort effect.

Members of the YE24 3rd grade cohort were Kindergarteners during the virtual year (YE21). While all educators did their best during the COVID virtual year, there is a vast extant literature that virtual learning was not on par with in-person, particularly for Kindergarters. From a developmental perspective, **everything known about early literacy points to Kindergarten being essential for equipping 5- and 6-year-olds with the foundational literacy skills to excel later in the educational careers**. The consequences of that trauma of interruption to that critical year still impact learning for that particular cohort.

Troy can—and should—do whatever it can to continue to remediate those in that particular cohort who still struggle to read. However, Troy is not responsible for either the COVID pandemic and almost certainly saved lives by going virtual in YE21. The educational consequences were devastating, but the alternative was worse. The purpose of raising the cohort effect is not to relitigate the decision to go virtual, but rather simply highlight that **to the extent that we see declines in the M-STEP scores of YE24 3rd Graders (and YE24 4th graders, who were 1st graders in YE21), there is far stronger evidence that this is the result of a cohort effect rather than other factors, including a curriculum that did not change.**

Descriptive Analysis: K-5 Chronic Absenteeism (K-5 CA)

The previous section presented evidence to show that:

1. G3 ELA did decline between pre- and post-COVID by 6.0 percentage points (pp).
2. However, G3 ELA has not been in a secular decline in the post-COVID years (YE22 to YE23) in a statistical sense
3. One explanation for the pre- vs post-COVID decline is a cohort effect

Although the evidence is quite strong that the cohort effect is primarily responsible for the decline, it is not necessarily mutually exclusive with an additional explanation: K-5 Chronic Absenteeism (K-5 CA).

Table 3 presents K-5 CA over time by school.

Table 3: Chronic Absenteeism Over Time By School

	CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM (GRADES K-5)								
	Pre-COVID			Post-COVID			Comparisons		
Elementary Schools	YE17	YE18	YE19	YE22	YE23	YE24	Pre-COVID Average	Post-COVID Average	Pre vs Post
Barnard Elementary	6.9%	4.3%	5.9%	21.3%	17.2%	13.9%	5.7%	17.5%	11.8
Bemis Elementary	7.2%	6.6%	7.7%	24.1%	16.4%	12.2%	7.2%	17.6%	10.4
Costello Elementary	7.3%	4.1%	4.3%	21.6%	13.0%	10.8%	5.2%	15.2%	10.0
Hamilton Elementary	7.0%	2.3%	3.0%	15.2%	12.9%	9.5%	4.1%	12.6%	8.5
Hill Elementary	4.3%	2.9%	6.0%	23.3%	14.5%	12.1%	4.4%	16.7%	12.3
Leonard Elementary	3.1%	2.3%	5.4%	21.5%	17.5%	13.0%	3.6%	17.3%	13.6
Martell Elementary	7.7%	6.4%	6.7%	18.4%	14.7%	12.2%	7.0%	15.1%	8.1
Morse Elementary	12.6%	7.9%	11.5%	31.8%	20.0%	20.0%	10.6%	23.9%	13.3
Schroeder Elementary	6.5%	8.0%	8.1%	16.8%	15.7%	11.9%	7.5%	14.8%	7.3
Troy Union Elementary	5.2%	2.9%	7.3%	22.6%	15.6%	14.6%	5.1%	17.7%	12.5
Wass Elementary	4.1%	0.9%	3.0%	17.1%	12.6%	7.6%	2.7%	12.4%	9.7
Wattles Elementary	7.5%	8.1%	8.1%	28.6%	21.0%	16.2%	7.9%	21.9%	13.9
K-5 Troy Schools	**6.8%**	**4.9%**	**6.6%**	**21.8%**	**15.9%**	**12.8%**	**6.1%**	**16.9%**	**10.8**
Oakland County	12.0%	16.3%	15.9%	31.7%	27.0%	26.5%	14.7%	28.4%	13.7
State of Michigan	15.6%	19.9%	19.7%	38.5%	30.8%	29.5%	18.4%	32.9%	14.5

Source: MISchoolData.org

There are at least two key findings to highlight:

1. K-5 CA has dramatically increased from the pre-COVID average (6.1%) to post-COVID average (16.9%); this decline is statistically significant
2. There has been a secular improvement in K-5 CA during the post-COVID years; this trend is statistically significant

As with G3 ELA, we can also explore the changes in chronic absenteeism over the years in the same way, which is what is presented in Table 4:

Table 4: Statistical Confidence Limits by Year for K-5 Chronic Absenteeism Rates

Year	Chronic Absenteeism Rate	Number of Students	Lower 95% Confidence Limit	Upper 95% Confidence Limit
YE17	6.8%	5,755	6.2%	7.5%
YE18	4.9%	5,823	4.4%	5.5%
YE19	6.6%	5,692	5.9%	7.2%
YE20	Year ended in March 2020			
YE21	Virtual year with alternative definitions of attendance			
YE22	21.8%	5,190	20.7%	23.0%
YE23	15.9%	5,221	15.0%	17.0%
YE24	12.8%	5,128	11.9%	13.8%
Pre-COVID Average	6.1%	17,270	5.7%	6.4%
Post-COVID Average	16.9%	15,539	16.3%	17.5%

Here, the post-COVID trend is statistically significant as YE22's confidence interval does not overlap with YE23's nor does YE23's overlap with YE24. And clearly the pre- versus post-COVID difference is statistically significant (i.e., no overlap of confidence intervals). This means that **not only is there a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-COVID (10.8 pp), but there is also a statistically significant trend for improvement in K-5 CA from YE22 to YE24** (5.9 pp from YE22 to YE23 and 3.1 pp from YE23 to YE24).

While the post-COVID trend is encouraging, **K-5 CA in YE24 was still more than twice what it was in the pre-COVID average**. Moreover, while progress has been made in the post-COVID period, progress has slowed.

Consequences of K-5 Chronic Absenteeism

There is a fairly large and robust academic literature that has examined the link between chronic absenteeism and academic achievement: **higher rates of chronic absenteeism are not only correlated with declining rates of proficiency, this relationship is causal**.

For the sake of brevity, I will not discuss all of the consequences except to note that in a large urban school district in Michigan, **not chronically absent students are about 5 times more likely to score as proficient as non-chronically absent students**, even after controlling for student characteristics.[6]

Some Consequences of Low 3rd Grade ELA Proficiency

At a panel discussion with three board members a few months ago, one of them remarked that G3 ELA was not so important because proficiency rates are much higher by 8th grade on the PSAT (PSAT8). I took exception to the remark for two reasons:

8th Grade "Proficiency" Is Very Different than Grades 3-7 Proficiency

First, while it is true that PSAT8 proficiency rates are considerably higher, that is because the PSAT8 is a very different assessment than M-STEP, which for ELA and Math is administered in Grades 3-7. In short**, the M-STEP is aligned with state standards and proficiency is calibrated by measuring mastery of grade-level standards**. On the other hand, the PSAT8 is calibrated using some fancy psychometrics to backwards engineer whether a student is on-track to score as "college ready" (not the same as proficient) on the SAT that most students take in 11th grade (SAT11). In turn, the SAT11 is calibrated to predict a 65% chance of earning a B- or better in a non-remedial first year college course in the subject.

If that seems confusing, that is because it is and relies on a lot of strong statistical assumptions about how students not only transition from high school to college, but also how they transition from middle school to high school and progress through high school. When M-STEP was first introduced in YE15, the state of Michigan had 8th graders take an M-STEP exam in 8th grade and then for a few years 8th graders took both an ELA and Math M-STEP and PSAT8 after the PSAT/SAT was introduced in YE16. However, that was a lot of state testing for 8th graders, who also take a Science and Social Studies M-STEP, so the state settled on PSAT8 as the lone state standardized assessment for 8th graders in ELA and Math.

The important take-away here is that **scoring as proficient on PSAT8 does not mean that a student has mastered Michigan's content standards for 8th grade**. Furthermore, it is really on a different scale than M-STEP. Therefore, an increase from M-STEP in 7th grade to PSAT8 does not indicate that students make greater progress in 8th grade. Rather, it is an artifact of the design of the assessments.

[6] Specifically, this result was found using a fixed effects logistic regression with student-level data. Since I do not have that sort of data for Troy, I cannot calculate this type of odds ratio. However, I would suspect it might be a little lower than 5 times in the context of Troy given the higher levels of overall proficiency.

The "Matthew Effect" And Its Consequences

There is a verse in the Christian Bible (Matthew 25:29) that can be summarized as "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer." In the context of literacy research, it is the observation that **students who excel in early elementary typically become stronger readers over time while students who struggle with early reading continue to struggle throughout their educational careers**, even into post-secondary. Because reading is foundational to mastering other subjects (primarily Social Studies, but also Math, Science, and other subjects), **reading at or above grade-level by the end of 3rd Grade has been identified by academic researchers as a critical milestone in students' K-12 careers**.

The consequences of struggling to read can adversely impact non-educational outcomes, such as a student's mental health. As you may remember from a board meeting earlier this year, a parent of a Troy graduate spoke at a board meeting about her son's mental health issues that she partially attributed to self-esteem issues stemming from his struggles with dyslexia. That powerful story highlights that **early literacy is an incredibly important issue that goes well beyond the classroom**.

The Matthew Effect also has implications for understanding the scope of consequences of K-5 CA. It is not simply that a student misses 18 or more days in an academic year (approximately one month's worth of instruction). **Rather, being chronically absent one year is predictive of future chronic absenteeism in later grades**. Usually chronic absenteeism is highest in Kindergarten and the slowly declines from 1st through 8th grades before increasing steadily in high school (i.e., it is U-shaped). Moreover, **the learning loss from just one year means that even if a student starts attending school regularly, they will have to achieve more than a year's typical growth to catch up**.[7]

Therefore, reading by 3rd Grade is essential for all students. The research and theories of learning that I am presenting are the same ones that motivated Michigan's Ready by Grade 3 (RBG3) law about a decade ago. While I do not agree with mandatory retention based on G3 ELA, I understand the motivation. The important take-away here is that **G3 ELA proficiency has long-term consequences that can extend well beyond elementary school**.

[7] Curriculum Associates' i-Ready assessment defines "Typical Growth" as the growth necessary for a student at the proficiency threshold in Year 1 to reach the proficiency threshold in Year 2. They also define a measure called "Stretch Growth," which is the growth necessary for a non-proficient student to reach proficiency within 2 years. Nationally, only about 55% of students achieve i-Ready Typical Growth and only about 33% achieve Stretch Growth in a single year while less than 20% achieve Stretch Growth in two consecutive years. In other words, it can be difficult (and expensive) to get a student to catchup once they have fallen behind, mostly because of the Matthew Effect.

Causal Analysis: The Effect of K-5 Chronic Absenteeism and 3rd Grade ELA M-STEP

Thus far, I have presented separate descriptive analyses of G3 ELA and K-5 CA while making some mention of literature that link the two. But while it is the case that G3 ELA post-COVID is lower than pre-COVID and K-5 CA is higher, one might wonder if that is just a coincidence. Or perhaps it is simply a spurious correlation.

A Causal Model

To explore whether G3 ELA is partially the result of K-5 CA I used an applied econometrics technique called a **fixed effects multivariate panel regression (FE regression)**. That is a fancy way of saying that I compiled data from YE16 to YE19 and YE22 to YE24 for all districts in Michigan, including not just G3 ELA and K-5 CA but also student characteristics including percent Economically Disadvantaged, percent English Language Learner, and percent Special Education.[8] The fixed effects refer to having a statistical control both for county and year, which controls for all variation not directly observed that does not change over time (e.g., annual snow fall).

The FE regression was useful in two ways. First, it confirmed that K5 CA is a statistically significant predictor of G3 ELA: **for each percentage point (pp) increase in K5 CA, G3 ELA falls by approximately 0.5 percentage points**. For example, a 10 pp improvement in K5 CA would produce an expected increase of 5 pp in G3 ELA proficiency after controlling for the student characteristics.

FE regressions provide what is considered a weak quasi-experimental design. Unfortunately, it is the best one can do with only school-level data available. But given that these findings are very consistent with prior research, **I am quite confident that the increase in K-5 CA is a major cause of lower G3 ELA in the post-COVID average**. While this does not exclude additional factors such as the curriculum or instruction, K-5 CA appears to be a driving factor in the decline of G3 ELA. And in fact, **the 10.8 pp actual increase in K-5 CA is about twice**

[8] I intentionally did not include race/ethnicity in these regressions. I did so for three reasons. First, when you include race/ethnicity, you are implicitly assuming lower groups for some groups of students, which I object to on philosophical grounds. Second, a practical consideration is that Troy is exceptional in Michigan for having a very high Asian population, which means that a high percentage of Asians may reflect a Troy effect because it is an outlier. Finally, Asians are a very heterogenous population (e.g., a Hmong refugee is a very different than a Chinese and Indian immigrant who came to the US on an F-1 or H-1B visa), so it is not clear exactly what one would be measuring. Moreover, other racial categories are similarly problematic (e.g., people of Middle Eastern descent are counted as “White” despite not having the same social privileges typical to those of European descent. So for all those reasons, race/ethnicity was not included in these regressions.

the actual 6.0 pp decrease in G3 ELA, which is consistent with what the FE regression predicts.

Residual Analysis

I also used the FE regression to predict G3 ELA scores and then compared them to actual scores. I ran two variations of the model: one with K-5 CA included and one without.

When I took the difference between predicted G3 ELA and actual G3 ELA without K-5 CA included, **Troy had a residual of approximately -0.13 standard deviations in YE24. Note that 0.13 standard deviations is approximately equivalent to about 3 months of learning**.[9] That means that given Troy's student characteristics (Economically Disadvantaged, ELL, and Special Education), actual achievement was lower than predicted.

However, **when I included K-5 CA in the regressions, the residual improved to -0.06 standard deviations, or about 1.4 months of learning**. That implies that elevated rates of K-5 CA is associated for about 1.5 months of learning (2.9 minus 1.4).

This residual analysis corroborates the previous finding that K-5 CA is a significant factor in driving lower G3 ELA scores in the post-COVID years. Now it does not explain everything, only about half of the below-expected performance. Possible factors that might be responsible include the aforementioned Matthew Effect. Now it could also be an issue with the district's K-5 ELA curriculum. The explanation is not possible to study with the available data, so this analysis is agnostic on whether Troy has a early literacy curriculum problem. So the parents complaining about Lucy Caulkins may have a point about needing to align with the Science of Reading. However, as shown, **the G3 ELA scores are not strong evidence to support assigning blame to the curriculum**.

Policy Recommendations

In the recently published Lenhoff and Singer book, "**Re-Thinking Chronic Absenteeism: Why Schools Can't Solve It Alone**," the authors argue that while chronic absenteeism has educational consequences, the root causes are not entirely related to schooling.[10] Moreover,

[9] Previous research has found that one year's worth of learning is approximately equal to 0.4 standard deviations on vertically integrated standardized assessments. 0.13 divided by 0.40 times 9 months equals 2.9 months of learning.

[10] Although N=1, this past year my own daughter, a Kindergarten student at Hamilton, was chronically absent (21 days absent). She loves school and my wife (a high school English/French teacher) and I are both committed to education. She just happened to be sick a lot this year because she is an only child who spent limited time with kids her own age until pre-school because of the COVID pandemic.

they are not always related to parental motivation. They recommend **schools partner with community organizations to help provide the material resources and other support that at-risk families need to improve their student's attendance**.

Lenhoff and Singer identify the many ways that socio-economic resources affect attendance. For example, transportation is a major issue, particularly for housing insecure students. Therefore, connecting housing insecure students with McKinney-Vento services can be helpful to improve attendance. Many parents with lower incomes have work schedules that may not align with the school day, which can cause students to miss school.

Whatever the causes, **community organizations that exist to support struggling families are better positioned to assist than public school districts**, which are neither designed nor funded to offer material support.

Troy Youth Assistance

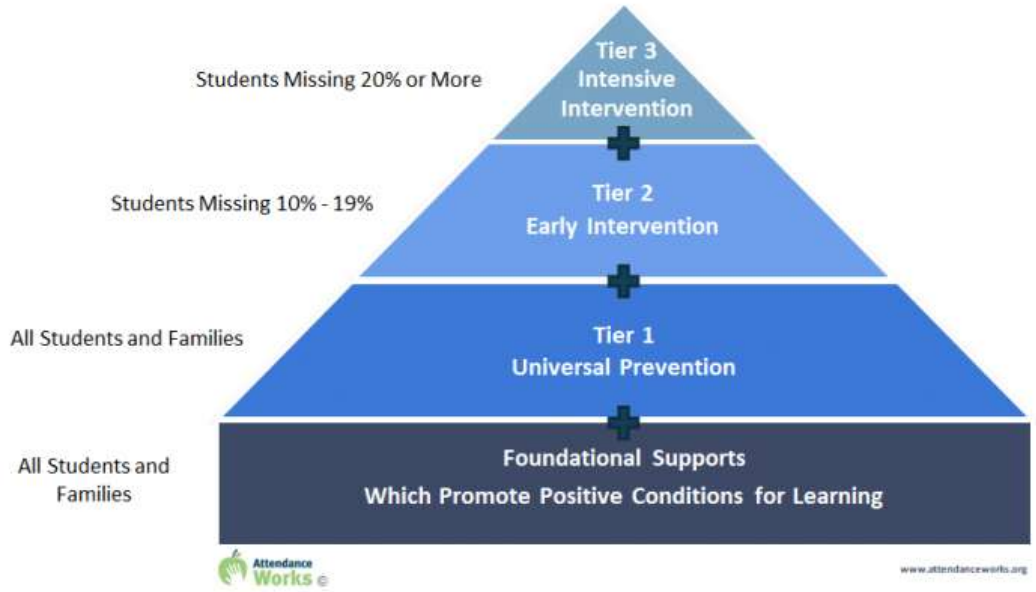
Here in Troy, Troy Youth Assistance (TYA) is such an organization. I did not mention this in my public comment, but I am the volunteer treasurer of TYA. I think that there may be an opportunity for the district to partner with TYA to help accelerate the improvements in K-5 chronic absenteeism, as well as chronic absenteeism in older grades as well.

Attendance Works

There is a national non-profit organization that has numerous free resources available to districts as well as community organizations that partner with districts: Attendance Works (https://www.attendanceworks.org/). Among other strategies, **Attendance Works has produced a research-based Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) focused on chronic absenteeism**. Similar to a MTSS used for academic interventions, there are three tiers of escalating intensity in interventions, as shown on Figure 1 (next page).

Prior to the COVID pandemic, Attendance Works partnered with Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) and Every School Day Counts Detroit, a coalition of local non-profits. Lenhoff, Singer, and I designed and conducted the program evaluation of the MTSS. Unfortunately, **the results were not successful, as described in their book. However, in my view, the problem was not with Attendance Works' model, but rather the scale of the problem in DPSCD**. In 2018-19, DPSCD had a chronic absenteeism rate of 56.4%, so essentially the MTSS was an "inverted pyramid":

Figure 1: Attendance Works' MTSS for Chronic Absenteeism



By inverted pyramid, I mean that in DPSCD there were many more Tier 2 and even Tier 3 students than there were Tier 1 students, so the system was overwhelmed. As a result of the findings of the program evaluation, DPSCD pivoted to other strategies following the pandemic.

However, I **believe that Attendance Works' MTSS could be successful in Troy because, while serious, the K-5 Chronic Absenteeism challenge is so much more tractable here compared to DPSCD**. While 13% K-5 Chronic Absenteeism is a challenge, I imagine that the MTSS could be successfully used to accelerate progress back towards the 5% pre-COVID rate.

If you would like to discuss how TYA could assist the district with deploying the MTSS, please contact me for further discussion.

About the Author

Walter Cook is the Senior Director of Research and Data Science for the Detroit Public Schools Community District. He has been studying K-12 Detroit educational systems for over a decade, first in the non-profit local advocacy organizations (Excellent Schools Detroit and New Detroit) and then spent about 4 years at Wayne State University's College of Education as an externally funded staff researcher. He has a Master's degree in Economics(Labor and Applied Econometrics) from Michigan State University, where he also left the PhD Education Policy program ABD in good standing with a doctoral specialization in Economics of Education. He is also currently pursuing an Executive MBA. He has lived in Troy for three years with his wife of nearly 20 years and 7 year-old daughter, who is a rising 1st grader at Hamilton Elementary School. His research has focused on chronic absenteeism, literacy interventions, and school choice and student mobility within metro Detroit.