Leveraging the Power Of Attendance Data:
Analyzing Trends in Attendance (Including Chronic Absence) Starting in the Early Grades
(Draft June 3, 2011)

This memo provides guidance for analyzing multiple measures of attendance including chronic absence and ensuring all involved have a common understanding about:

a. Why conduct an analysis of attendance data including chronic absence?
b. What questions could this analysis answer?
c. What would the analysis involve?
d. How might the results be used?

A. Why Conduct An Analysis of Chronic Absence?

Chronic absence occurs when children miss 10 percent or more (nearly a month) of school over the course of a year *for any reason*. Unlike truancy, which refers only to unexcused absences, chronic absence includes both excused and unexcused absences that may result from illness, family mobility, etc. For many students, especially those living in poverty, chronic absence in kindergarten can translate into poor academic performance throughout elementary school. [i] By 6th grade, poor attendance is a proven indicator of high school drop out. [ii] By 9th grade, missing excessive amounts of school can predict drop out with more accuracy than 8th grade test scores.[iii] In addition, when chronic absence reaches high levels, it affects all students as teachers must spend time reviewing concepts for children who missed the lesson in the first place. It also decreases the educational resources available to all students by reducing state funding which is distributed on the basis of average daily attendance.

Yet, most school districts don't know the extent to which chronic absence is a problem in some or all of their schools because they only track average daily attendance and truancy. These measures can mask chronic absence. For example, even in a school with 95 percent average daily attendance, 30 percent of the students could be chronically absent if these absences are concentrated among a small but still significant minority of students. At the same time, truancy misses chronic absence especially among young children who typically stay home with the knowledge of an adult who can call in an excuse.

B. What questions would it seek to answer?

Using data already available through the school district, we would examine the following questions about attendance patterns. For the purposes of this research, we recommend looking at satisfactory attendance (missing less than 5 percent of school), at-risk attendance (missing between 5-10 percent of school) chronic absence (missing 10 percent or more of school), severe chronic absence (missing 20 percent or more of school), and average daily attendance (the percent of students who attend school each day).

a) **To what extent is chronic & severe chronic absence an issue throughout the district or is it concentrated in particular grades, schools, sub-populations, or geographic regions?**

b) **How do satisfactory attendance, chronic and severe chronic absence levels vary across schools and levels (elementary, middle or high)?**

c) **What is the relationship between overall attendance patterns and school wide academic performance?**

C. ***What would the analysis involve?***

1. ***School Level Analysis:*** For each school, calculate the number and percent of students, overall, by grade and by sub-population (gender, ethnicity, ELL, special ed) who have :

   - Severe chronic absence
   - Chronic absence
   - At risk attendance
   - Satisfactory attendance

   If possible, calculate these levels for three or more years so we can look at trends over time. (See Appendix A).

2. ***District Grade Analysis****:* Use the school level analysis data to construct a district level analysis of overall levels of attendance patterns by (chronic absence – including both chronic & severe), at-risk attendance and satisfactory attendance by grade. (See Appendix B)

3. ***District Sub-population Analysis*** Use the school level analysis data to construct a district level analysis of overall levels of attendance patterns by (chronic absence – including both chronic & severe), at risk attendance and satisfactory attendance by sub-population. (See Appendix C)

4. ***School by School Comparison*** Use the school by school data to create a summary profile of absenteeism that shows how much absenteeism is concentrated or spread across schools and also includes other frequently used data points (e.g. ADA, average CST scores, Free & Reduced Price lunch levels, & truancy levels) so you can see how these indicators are connected (See Appendix D)

5. ***Mapping Chronic Absence:*** If the technology capacity is available, use student level address information combined with absence data to map out where students with chronic absence (including severe chronic absence) live in the city.

D. *How Could The Results Be Used?*

This analysis of district-level and school-level attendance and absence data could help to:

(1) Identify where relevant resources available from the district or public agencies or community agencies could be targeted in order to improve attendance

(2) Improve school-level absenteeism-related work by helping to identify schools with lower than typical levels of absenteeism despite challenging community conditions (e.g. large percentage of free & reduced price lunch students) and then helping to highlight some of these best practices. It also can help to identify the schools struggling with the most serious attendance challenges so resources can be brought in to help turn around the situation.

(3)Inform evaluation of school-level attendance-related work, allowing for the comparison of patterns at a particular school over time and with other schools and clarifying what are norms for attendance patterns in elementary, middle and high school.

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[i] Chang & Romero, ***Present, Engaged & Accounted For:*** *The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades, National Center for Children in Poverty: September 2008*

[ii] Preventing Student Disengagement and Keeping Students on the Graduation Path in Urban Middle-Grades Schools: Early Identification and Effective Interventions Robert Balfanz, Lisa Herzog, Douglas J. Mac Iver. EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST, 42(4), 223–235 Copyright 2007, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

[iii] Allensworth, E. M., & Easton, J. Q. (2007). *What matters for staying on-track and graduating in Chicago Public High Schools: A close look at course grades, failures, and attendance in the freshman year.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, Consortium on Chicago School Research. Retrieved November 8, 2008