

# Truancy and Academic Performance Crisis: A Call for Intervention in New Orleans Charter Schools

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## ABSTRACT

Truancy among elementary students is an escalating crisis that threatens academic achievement, particularly in public charter schools. This study explores the impact of truancy on student performance in Mathematics and Language Arts, by focusing on the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) test scores. This study analyzed data from the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 academic years, to examine a sample of 159 truant students out of 550 enrolled in a New Orleans charter school. Using a descriptive-correlational design and regression analysis in SPSS 20.0, findings reveal that chronic truancy is a significant predictor of poor academic outcomes. In Language Arts, 53% of truant students score in the Unsatisfactory and Approaching Basic categories (estimate = 2.116,  $p < 0.001$ ), while in Mathematics, only 9.4% achieve Mastery, with none reaching Advanced (estimate = 2.047,  $p < 0.001$ ). These results underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions. Although gender and ethnicity do not show statistically significant effects, the overarching issue remains that truancy undermines student success. Addressing this crisis requires stricter attendance policies, enhanced parental involvement, and academic support systems to mitigate the long-term consequences of chronic absenteeism on student achievement.

**KEYWORDS:** Truancy, LEAP Projections, Academic Performance, Mathematics, Language Arts, Charter Schools, Elementary, Academic Support.

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## INTRODUCTION

Truancy has remained a major challenge in American education, thereby affecting student achievement and long-term success. According to Sutphen, Ford, and Flaherty (2010), truancy is defined as five or more unexcused absences in a semester. Truancy is often an early warning sign of academic struggles and dropout risks (Sutphen, Ford, & Flaherty, 2010). While absenteeism and chronic absence are related terms, truancy typically refers to unexcused absences and has historically been addressed through punitive measures (Attwood & Croll, 2006). However, modern research highlights truancy as a symptom of broader social and economic issues, which in effect necessitates systemic interventions (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

In New Orleans, where a unique public charter school system emerged after Hurricane Katrina, truancy remains a pressing concern. Despite efforts such as early-warning systems and parental outreach, absenteeism persists, particularly among elementary students. Research indicates that early-age truancy is linked to poor academic outcomes, including lower test scores and increased dropout risks (Chang & Romero, 2008; McKinney, 2013). However, there is limited research focusing on truancy in New Orleans' charter schools, particularly in relation to subject-specific academic performance.

This study examines the relationship between truancy type (chronic vs. non-chronic) and academic achievement in language and mathematics among Pre-K to fourth-grade students in a New Orleans charter school. Specifically, it seeks to determine whether truancy significantly impacts student performance in these subjects. The findings aim to inform policymakers and educators on effective strategies for improving attendance and academic outcomes in charter school settings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW: TRUANCY AND ACADEMIC DISPARITIES

The evidence in the literature is clear that—truancy is a critical barrier to academic success, which is disproportionately affecting low-income and minority students (Chang & Romero, 2008). Also, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory highlights the complex interplay of family, school, community,

and societal factors that influence student attendance and performance (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). From economic instability to school policies, these factors shape educational outcomes in profound ways (Guy-Evans, 2024).

Truancy is not just an individual issue; it is a systemic challenge requiring a collective response. By addressing absenteeism head-on, stakeholders can close achievement gaps, improve long-term student success, and build a stronger future for all children (Attendance Works, 2006). Moving forward requires dedication, creative solutions, and teamwork. By taking action today, stakeholders can ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed.

Now is the time for educators, policymakers, and community leaders to take action. Schools must implement targeted interventions by: (a) providing transportation assistance, (b) expanding meal programs, and (c) fostering stronger school-community partnerships—to mitigate the effects of poverty on attendance (Romero & Lee, 2008). According to Gottfried (2010), educators should adopt data-driven strategies to identify at-risk students early and offer personalized support. Additionally, Sutphen, Ford, and Flaherty (2010) argued that parents and guardians must be empowered with resources to reinforce the importance of consistent school attendance.

### **FINDINGS:**

This study highlights a pressing issue of low academic performance among truant students. The study revealed that chronic truancy significantly hampers academic performance, particularly in mathematics and language arts, among elementary students at a public charter school in New Orleans. The data clearly shows that 65% of truant students fall into the lowest performance categories in mathematics, and over half (53%) struggle with literacy. These findings underscore the urgent need for intervention to combat absenteeism and improve academic achievement. The research further reveals that chronic truancy is a key predictor of poor academic outcomes, and students who miss more than 10% of instructional days are far more likely to perform at unsatisfactory levels. However, factors like gender and ethnicity did not show a significant impact on performance, thereby reaffirming that addressing truancy itself is the most critical step. To reverse these trends, targeted interventions are needed. Stakeholders must implement structured attendance policies, support literacy development, and offer individualized academic assistance.

### **TARGET AUDIENCE:**

The target audience for the research findings includes a diverse range of stakeholders, each playing a vital role in addressing chronic truancy and improving educational outcomes for students. Educational leaders and administrators, such as school principals, superintendents, and district officials, are integral to policy development and school management. Charter school boards and education administrators also play a crucial role in enhancing student attendance and academic performance. Teachers and classroom educators, particularly those specializing in language arts and mathematics, are directly impacted by truancy and have the opportunity to implement strategies that engage students. Additionally, special education and support staff working with at-risk students or those facing attendance challenges are essential to the success of these initiatives.

Policy makers and education advocates, including local and state education policymakers, are vital for reforming attendance policies and promoting educational equity. Advocacy groups and non-profits dedicated to student success, attendance, and academic performance provide valuable support in addressing truancy. Parents of students in grades Pre-K through fourth grade, especially those with children at risk of chronic truancy, are also a critical part of the audience. Family engagement coordinators are essential in strengthening family involvement to support student success.

Community leaders and stakeholders, such as local community organizations, youth services, and support groups, play a key role in collaborating with schools to reduce absenteeism and provide academic support. Social workers and counselors working with students facing attendance-related challenges are also vital in addressing these barriers. Finally, education researchers and scholars studying the effects of truancy on academic performance are instrumental in gathering data to inform interventions. Graduate students and academics researching related topics in education policy and student engagement also contribute significantly to understanding and addressing this issue. Together, these diverse stakeholders are essential in the effort to reduce chronic truancy and improve educational outcomes for students in New Orleans and beyond.

## **ACTIONABLE STEPS TO COMBAT TRUANCY AND IMPROVE STUDENT SUCCESS**

To effectively address truancy and its long-term impact on student success, immediate action is essential. The following steps outline strategies that the following target audience, such as schools, families, and communities can implement to reduce absenteeism or truancy, and to improve academic outcomes for all students.

### ***Strengthen Attendance Policies***

Schools must adopt stricter attendance policies, incorporating both incentives for improved attendance and consequences for chronic absenteeism. By enforcing attendance expectations, schools can create a culture of accountability, ensuring that students remain engaged and committed to their education. This proactive approach not only helps address attendance but also sets the foundation for academic success.

### ***Enhance Parental Engagement***

It is critical for schools to actively engage parents through workshops, trainings, meetings, and outreach programs that emphasize the long-term academic consequences of truancy. By helping parents understand the direct impact of absenteeism on their child's academic trajectory, schools can encourage stronger support for school attendance efforts and help address any underlying issues at home. Parental involvement is a key factor in student success, and their engagement is essential to overcoming absenteeism.

### ***Implement Early Intervention Programs***

Developing early-warning systems can help identify at-risk students before truancy becomes a persistent issue. By providing timely academic and social support, schools can intervene early and prevent students from falling further behind. Early intervention is crucial to re-engaging students, by ensuring they receive the resources they need to succeed and avoid academic decline.

### ***Expand Community Partnerships***

Schools should collaborate with local community organizations and social service agencies to address external barriers to attendance, such as housing instability, transportation issues, and food insecurity. By expanding community partnerships, schools can provide wraparound services that support not only students but also their families, thereby creating a more stable and supportive environment for learning.

### ***Increase Academic Support***

Schools must offer targeted academic interventions such as tutoring, mentoring, and remedial programs to help students catch up on missed learning due to absenteeism. These supports can help students overcome educational gaps and ensure that they remain on track academically. Without these resources, students who have fallen behind are at greater risk of disengagement and eventual dropout.

## **CONCLUSION**

The consequences of inaction are severe. Without immediate intervention, truant students will continue to underperform, thereby widening the educational achievement gap, especially for low-income and minority students. The time to act is now—policymakers, educators, and community leaders must collaborate to prevent long-term academic setbacks, reduce dropout rates, and ensure that all students have equitable access to high-quality education. By addressing truancy today is an investment in the future of New Orleans' youth, their academic success, and their long-term opportunities. Together, by strengthening attendance policies, increasing parental involvement, intervening early, expanding community partnerships, and providing academic support, we can create an education system that ensures success for every student. Now is the time to take action and make a tangible difference in the lives of our students.

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