



Music and the Arts May Reduce Chronic Absenteeism: A Four-Year Study in New York City Public Schools

An Exploratory Study in New York City, NY

In order to examine whether there is a relationship between the level of arts implementation in schools and their attendance rates, researchers from Metis Associates examined data from four school years in New York City's (NYC) 1,700 public schools which serve more than 1.1 million students. The study was designed to address the following research question:



What is the relationship between the amount of arts that schools provide and their school-day attendance?

Chronic Absenteeism is a Critical and Growing Problem in the U.S.

Chronic absenteeism—that is, when students miss 10% or more of the school year—has emerged as one of the most significant barriers to student achievement and educational equity in the U.S., with even greater chronic absentee rates in high poverty schools. Clearly, students who are not in school miss out on important learning, leading to lower academic achievement.

What Can be Done to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism in Our Schools?

In 2017, Attendance Works and Everyone Graduates Center published “Portraits of Change,” a landmark article that laid out three tiers of support to address the issue of chronic absenteeism: Prevention, early intervention, and specialized support. The first tier, prevention, focuses on engaging school climate and positive relationships. This is where music and the arts come in. Research has connected implementation of the arts in schools to a positive school climate.



Chronic Absenteeism is a Significant Issue in New York City

The Metis study found that over 60% of NYC public schools had high chronic absenteeism rates between 2015 and 2019. And the percentage was even higher in high schools—ranging from 80.5% to 82.9%.

More Music and Arts Were Associated with Less Chronic Absenteeism

Importantly, however, the study found that offering more music and arts was associated with lower chronic absenteeism rates and higher overall school-day attendance rates.

But What About When Other School Characteristics Are Considered?

Offering music and the arts are still significant predictors of lower chronic absenteeism rates at the elementary and middle school levels.

Of course, there are many factors that may influence absenteeism at schools. Statistics allow for us to control for some of these factors, like the school's **economic need index**, its size, and the percentage of English language learners and special education students.

The Metis study showed that arts implementation level was still a significant predictor of chronic absenteeism rates for elementary schools in all four years of the study even when other school-wide factors were included in the analysis. Arts implementation level was also a significant predictor of chronic absenteeism rates for middle school in 2017-18 and 2018-19. These analyses showed that the higher the arts implementation, the lower the rates of chronic absenteeism. Data for high school was not conclusive for predicting chronic absenteeism in this study. More research is needed about complex factors that can impact school attendance at these grade levels.



The **economic need index** measures the socioeconomic circumstances of a school's population and assigns a score to each school based on the number of students eligible for free lunch or public assistance or who live in temporary housing.

School Level	2015-16	2015-17	2017-18	2018-19
Arts Significantly Predict Chronic Absenteeism Rates				
Elementary	✓	✓	✓	✓
Middle			✓	✓
High				



What is Our Call to Action?

The results from the nation's largest school district indicate that there is a connection between arts offerings and school-day attendance, particularly at the elementary and middle school levels. We encourage you to present these findings to stakeholders in your communities.



Show these findings to your school administrators

Chances are that your school is struggling with chronic absenteeism like the majority of schools across the country. Let your school administrators know that this study shows that the arts may be key to turning that trend around.



Present the information at a school board meeting

It is important to ensure that the arts are continually part of the conversations that involve budgets and programming. Make sure your elected officials know the data!



Offer this brochure to parents

Parents can be our most important advocates. Make sure that they are aware of the data that support the arts, so they can use it on behalf of their children.



Tips for Putting Together a Presentation

- Start by reviewing chronic absenteeism data for your school on your state's website or by contacting your school district's attendance office.
- Gather chronic absenteeism data in your school or district, including trends over multiple years if possible. Seeing the problem in one's own community increases the impact.
- Ground the argument for the arts in theory and research. Previous research tells us that improving school climate reduces student absenteeism, and it also tells us that the arts can improve school climate.
- Emphasize the strength of these findings, which show results from four years of data in the nation's largest school district.



Study Methodology

This study was conducted with NYC public schools using arts implementation data from NYC Department of Education's (DOE) Arts Count initiative and school-wide chronic absenteeism and attendance rates provided by their Research and Policy Support Group. Arts implementation was assessed using arts indices that include data such as: arts disciplines offered, student arts participation, numbers of certified arts teachers, and others. Chronic absenteeism was classified based on standard definitions. Data were analyzed across four school years: 2015-16 through 2018-19. For more information on the methodology see the full report at NAMMFoundation.org.

Study Limitations

- While controls were put into place to account for other school-wide factors that may affect chronic absenteeism, this study was not designed to test causation, and therefore limited causal attribution can be made.
- Because the data gathered on arts implementation were self-reported by schools, it should be validated to ensure accuracy.
- Additionally, separate studies could be conducted to examine the validity of the arts index levels.
- Lastly, while the NYC DOE provided an excellent school system to investigate these questions, the results found in this large, urban setting may not be generalizable to other school districts, such as those in suburban or rural settings. In the future it would be beneficial to conduct similar studies in other settings.

Resources and References

For the impact that the arts can have on school climate:

Snyder, L., Klos, P., & Grey-Hawkins, L. (2014). Transforming teaching through arts integration: AI implementation results: Middle school reform through effective arts integration professional development. *Journal for Learning through the Arts*, 10(1), 1-24.

Chemi, T. (2014). The artful teacher: A conceptual model for arts integration in schools. *Studies in Art Education: Issues and Research*, 56(1), 370-383.

For the impact that the arts can have on student engagement:

Bowen, D. H., & Kisida, B. (2019). Investigating causal effects of arts education experiences: Experimental evidence from Houston's Arts Access Initiative. *Research Report*, Vol. 7, Issue 4. Rice Kinder Institute for Urban Research.

For the relationship between arts and school-day attendance:

Brouillette, L., Childress-Evans, K., Hinga, B. & Farkas, G. (2014). Increasing the school engagement and oral language skills of ELLs through arts integration in the primary grades. *Journal of Learning through the Arts*, 10(1), 1-25.

For more information about chronic absenteeism in the U.S.:

Works, A., & Center, E. G. (2017). Portraits of change: Aligning school and community resources to reduce chronic absence. *Attendance Works*, Everyone Graduates Center.

About The NAMM Foundation



The NAMM Foundation advances active participation in music making across the lifespan by supporting scientific research, philanthropic giving and public service programs.

Visit NAMMFoundation.org for more information.

About Metis Associates



Metis Associates is a national consulting firm that delivers highly customized research and evaluation, grant writing, and data management services. We have over four decades of experience providing data-informed solutions across the social service sector. We support our clients' missions and take pride in building their capacity with our knowledge, skills, and technical expertise. Metis is headquartered in New York City and has additional offices in Atlanta, Philadelphia, and Oakland.

