

## Is optional school an acceptable subject to parents?

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Although almost all students miss school on some days during their elementary and high school years due to occasional illness and family needs, some students often miss school. Another common estimate is that 10 percent of students miss at least 10 percent of school days each year. Despite being counted as absent all day, many students skip classes even though they are officially in school. In fact, students may miss class because they simply choose to skip rather than miss out on the day. As shown in the diagram below, the rate of absenteeism of students for no reason, on the days they study at a particular time, doubles when they enter high school (at least in this urban school district). Moreover, the absence of unreasonable classes on the days when students are in school means almost every increase in total absenteeism from high school.

Absenteeism and skipping class are the result. Using variability in the presence of adverse weather conditions, one study estimated that each absence reduced statistical achievement by a standard deviation of 0.05, suggesting that the presence could account for up to one-fourth of the income gap. A similar study using data from Philadelphia students found that staying away from school increases student absenteeism and results in lower score and test scores.

School, in general, and certain classes, in particular, can also be an unpleasant experience for students. More than one in four U.S. students (28 percent) between the ages of 12 and 18 say that they have been bullied at school. There are also long-term negative effects on students. Even without direct exploitation, some classes can be a painful experience; the task can be very easy or far away. It is very difficult or discipline is very annoying to deal with.

Some teachers are more capable of involving students in the classroom than others. Moreover, these are the unchanging skills of teachers. If a teacher is successful in engaging students in one year, he or she will likely be more inclined to involve students in the next year and beyond. In fact, the success of teachers in participation (as measured by the presence in the classroom of students) is at least consistent in all classes over time as the success of teachers in developing students' maths skills or English language skills.

Keeping students in school and in class is important... and we have policy guidelines for doing so. Preliminary evidence suggests, for example, that low-cost interventions to inform parents when their children are absent from school can reduce chronic absenteeism. In general, if some teachers may include students in their classrooms, then others may not. The same types of policies and procedures that underpin the development of teaching measures that enhance mathematical skills or English language skills can be used to develop similar measures that focus on student engagement. The same kinds of policies that have led to the development of mathematical teaching in English — such as the general response and common language of good teaching to lead to improved interaction. In addition, by including attending as a reference under the All Student Succeeds Act, districts can promote this development. We need to learn how to engage students and how information should be used to help teachers improve and to select the most effective teachers in this field in the areas where they are most needed.

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