Student/Chronic Absenteeism

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Addressing
Student Absenteeism

Overview

- Student Absenteeism, also known as Chronic Absenteeism is, "When a student is absent for 10% or more of the school days while enrolled in school".

- Rates of Student Absenteeism have been rising nationwide, with more than 33% of US students considered as chronically absent, or absent for 15+ days.

- We set out to understand why rates of Student Absenteeism has been on the rise in our community and to brainstorm and research possible solutions for such.
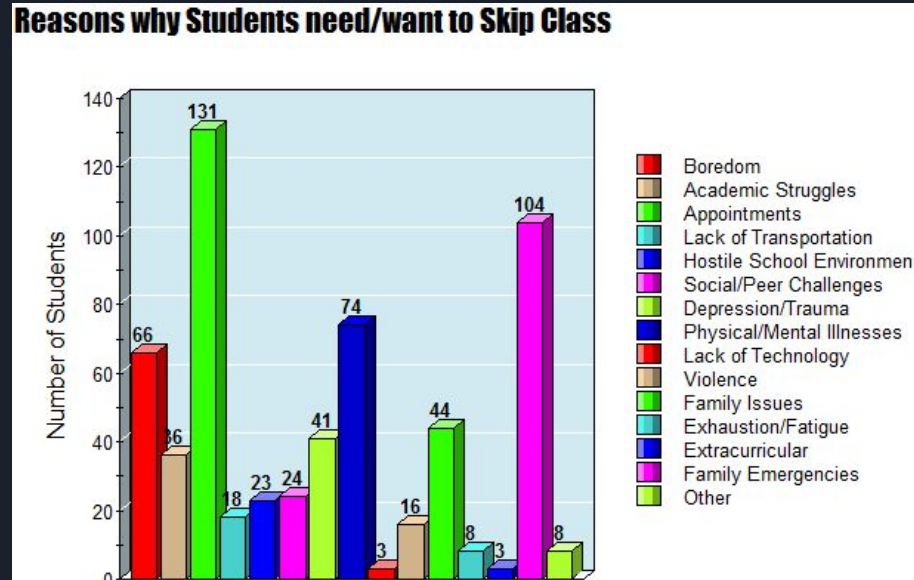
Absenteeism in MCPS

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is the public school district for our county.

Last school year, 25% of students were Chronically Absent, with rates as high as 50% in the overwhelmingly Latino JFK High School.

MCPS

Our Findings

- To understand the root causes of Student Absenteeism, we surveyed our classmates at Northwest High School
- We had received 167 responses, with each student explaining their personal reasons for absences in the last year

Personal Responses from Students

- "Many students I see around the school tend to skip to keep on talking with friends they tend to see school as less of a learning place and more as a hangout place. I'm a good student myself i find it tempting to just skip a class or two to get my mind right but I know I have to go to keep my grades in a good state."

- "I've seen some in my friends and I, home lives beings hard, and mental health issues getting in the way. But people also just skip because they just don't feel like being at school."

- "Yes, I have seen signs of Student/Chronic Absenteeism around the school from over the years at Northwest. I don't know why some students skip but most of them probably have personal needs (ex. mental health reasons) and that's why they can't come to school. Sometimes, students may have younger siblings that they have to take care of and it can be a lot."

- "People I see in the morning don't come to class in the afternoon."

Government Proposed Policies:

Truancy Prevention Program (TTP)

- Implemented in 2010 by the State's Attorney Office, *not* MCPS
  - Initially an extension of the district court, has since expanded
- Individual solutions for each student by combining school, county, and state resources to understand causes and address effects of the student's absence
- Served 245 students and 19 middle schools in 2017-18
- Reduced truancy by 60% on average, improved performance continued after students left the program

Issues:

- Currently limited due to the amount of man hours and effort required per student
- Many local organizations are involved on a *volunteer*-based system, meaning they can not be relied on for a larger network of schools

Possible Solutions

TPP 2.0

- There is no 'One-size-fit-all' solution
  - A punishment given to a student who lacks transportation would only serve to ward them off from school, while punishment should be given to a student who willingly skips class without reason
- Automate elements of the old TPP
  - Use pre existing digital infrastructure to automatically 'flag' chronically absent students and send them questionnaires to understand the causes of their absences
  - Based on their response, they can be assigned to a specialized case worker quicker or sent information which covers their specific issue
- Use county resources to advertise the program to both potential volunteers and students in need
  - Work with education majors from Montgomery College to intern as a TPP volunteer/paid counselors

Possible Solutions

Improve Existing Countermeasures

- Investigate and Reform Security
  - Current MCPS Security Officers have been noted for not being effective at their job, due to numerous reasons such as staffing shortages and misconduct (not doing their job).
  - Counties must investigate and retrain security officers in schools to prevent misconduct.
- Notices for reasonable Absences
  - Students who must be absent for school for predictable reasons such as for appointments, vacations, or other predictable events must notify the school in 3 - 5 days in advance.
- Starting School Later in the Day
  - Requires larger reform, however a later start date would allow students to sleep for longer and be more prepared for class.

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Questions and Answers

Thank you for your support, judges!

Do you have any questions or concerns?