



DETROIT'S UNIQUELY CHALLENGING CONTEXT FOR STUDENT ATTENDANCE

COLLABORATIVE POLICY RESEARCH

This research is the result of a collaboration between Wayne State University's College of Education and a constellation of community partners interested in improving Detroit schools, called the Detroit Education Research Partnership. We orient our work around the pressing policy needs of the Detroit education community, and we seek to inform the design of local educational reforms. We believe that education reform in other places has important lessons for our collective work in Detroit, but that any solution for Detroit will have to respond to the unique strengths and needs of our community. Download the full report, give us feedback, and see all of our research at <http://go.wayne.edu/DetEdResearch>

DETROIT'S UNIQUELY CHALLENGING CONTEXT

Chronic absenteeism is a multifaceted problem that requires attention to a student's immediate and broader environment. Most research on attendance interventions has focused on process, person, and smaller-scale context, in part because these are the ecological factors that are closest to a school's locus of control. In contrast, this policy brief focuses on the macro-level context. While schools and districts have a role to play in addressing these broader structural factors, they cannot be addressed by schools or districts alone. These contextual barriers to attendance require coordinated action, and that may be particularly important in Detroit, where absenteeism is higher than in all other major cities. This report addresses the need for a comprehensive understanding of the structural and environmental conditions that moderate student attendance in Detroit and other major U.S. cities.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- Nationwide, long-term population change, asthma rates, poverty and unemployment rates, residential vacancy rates, violent crime rates, average monthly temperature, and racial segregation for a city's greater metropolitan area are all significantly correlated with city-wide rates of chronic absenteeism.
- Detroit has the highest chronic absenteeism rate in the country (about 50%), and it has a uniquely challenging context for student attendance. Among cities with 500,000 or more residents, Detroit has the highest adult asthma rate (14%), unemployment rate (about 20%), poverty rate (about 38%), violent crime rate (about 20 per 1,000 people), and residential vacancy rate (27%). In addition, it has the greatest population loss since 1970 (about 50% decline), one of the lowest average monthly temperatures (about 49° F), and is among the most segregated major metropolitan areas in the country.

