

Who Else is Missing From Our Classrooms? Migrant Students, Chronic Absenteeism, and Implications for School Leaders

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Hidden in Plain Sight





Zones of a Student's Daily Life

Gottfried, 2014

Chronic Absenteeism as a Wicked Problem

Characteristics of Wicked Problems	Definition	Absenteeism Example
1) Unstructured	Lack of consensus about the problem definition, causes and effects, and/or solutions.	Chronic absenteeism can be caused by one or more causes within the zones of a student's daily life
2) Cross-cutting	Multiple stakeholders are involved Cut across hierarchy and authority structures within and between organizations.	Absenteeism causes implicate health care, housing, mental health, child welfare, transportation, etc.
3) Relentless	No finish line—problem might not be solved once and for all.	Absenteeism is a systemic issue that has persisted despite targeted interventions, campaigns, and strategies

STUDIES

Texas Migrant Education Program

- **Study 1: K-12 outcomes**
 - Total/Chronic absenteeism
- **Study 2: School Leaders & Migrant Students**
 - School leaders understanding of chronic absenteeism
 - School leaders perceptions of chronic absenteeism and migrant students
 - Policy Implications

STUDY 1: K-12 OUTCOMES

TEXAS MIGRANT EDUCATION PROGRAM



MIGRANT STUDENTS IN THE US

Migrant children are one of the **most marginalized** in the US

- Frequent migration
- High poverty
- Lack access to quality health care
- English learners (1/3 LEP)
- High opportunity cost of education

Migrants face serious challenges

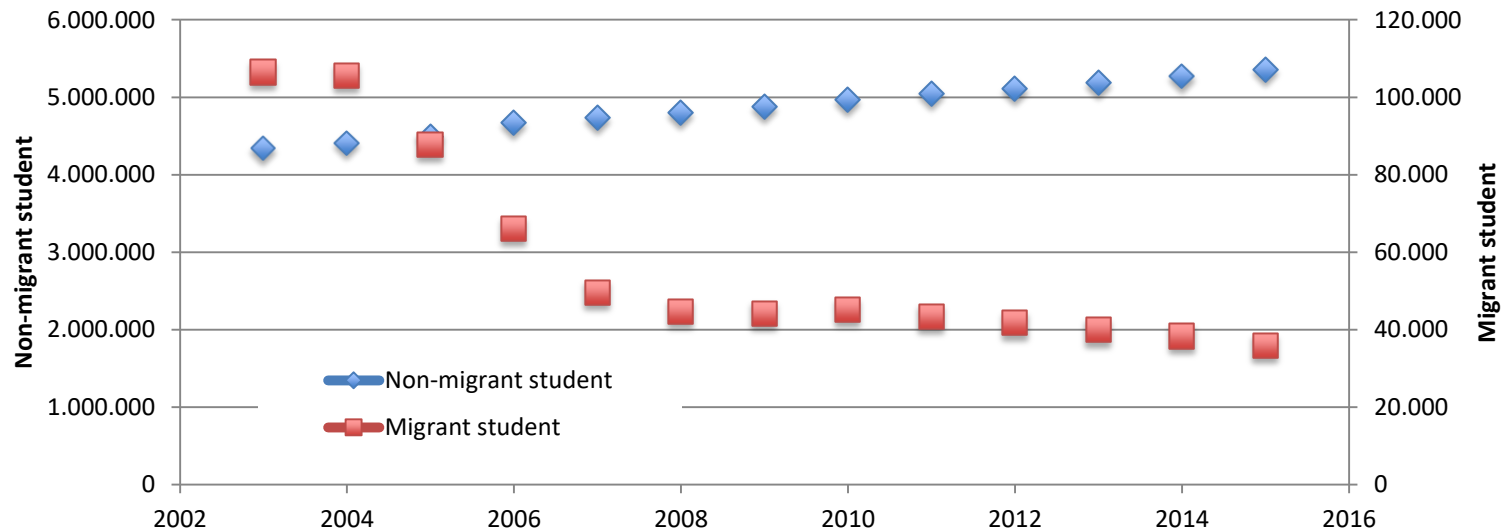
- E.g., Undocumented immigration status

Results in high drop-out rate – 50%

MIGRANT EDUCATION PROGRAM (MEP)

Migrant Education Program (MEP) \$350 million / year

- MEP has strict eligibility criteria
- Counseling, tutoring, referrals to social services, SAT/ACT prep
- 1% of total K-12 population
- 2016 => 36K MEP student in Texas and 316k in US



STUDY 1: CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM



STUDY 1: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the rate of total and chronic absenteeism for Latino migrant students versus Latino non-migrant students?
2. What is the rate of total and chronic absenteeism for Latino migrant students as they switch in and out of eligibility for the TMEP?



CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Chronic absenteeism is missing 10%+ of school year

- Includes excused or unexcused absences and suspensions
- Tied to both in-school and neighborhood causes
- Over 6 million students are chronically absent each year
- In Texas ~14% of migrant students are chronically absent

Chronic absenteeism is strong predictor of important outcomes

- Strongly correlated to poor **educational** and **life** outcomes
 - Dropout
 - College enrollment
 - Graduation

Limited research on chronic absenteeism in
migrant student population

DATA

- K-12 data from TEA on attendance, enrollment, and graduation (files)
- Years: 2003-2015 longitudinal data
- Latino migrant and non-migrant students only

<u>Data</u>	# of Observations	Total # of Individuals	# of MEP obsv	# of MEP Students
TEA Data – 100%	30,907,536	5,191,405	728,951	217,437

ANALYZED VARIABLES

Dependent variables:

1. **Total Days Absent** and 2. **Chronic Absenteeism**

Independent variables:

- MEP status (eligible for MEP)
- Grade (EE – 12th)
- Sex
- English Learner (Bilingual, ESL, LEP)
- Economically Disadvantaged
- At Risk of Dropping Out
- Immigrant

STATISTICAL METHODS

Odds Ratio Logistic Regression

Zero Inflated Poisson Regression

Panel data with Fixed effects

Conditional fixed-effects logistic regression

Poisson Regression

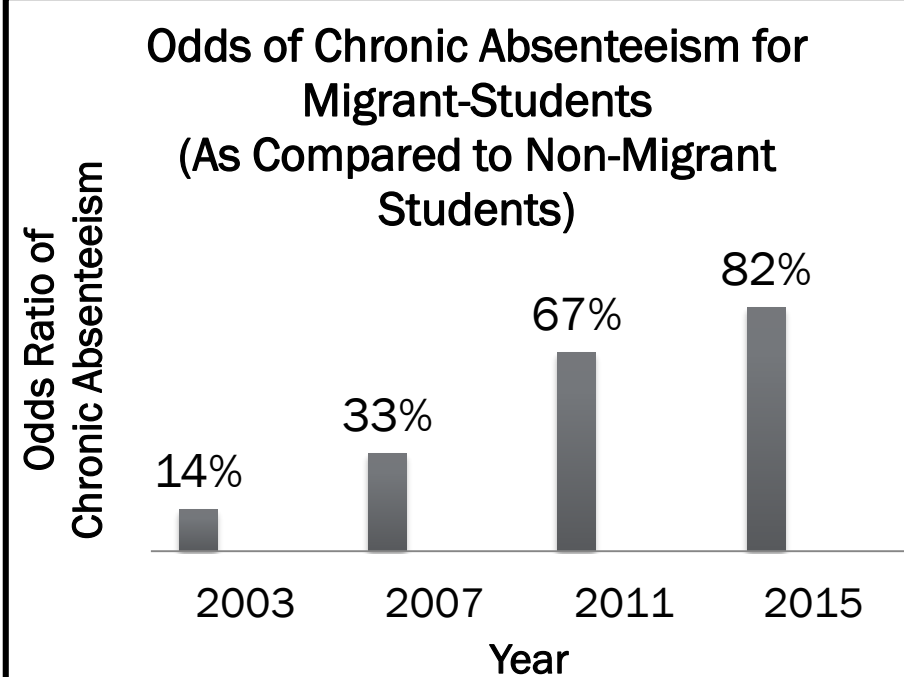
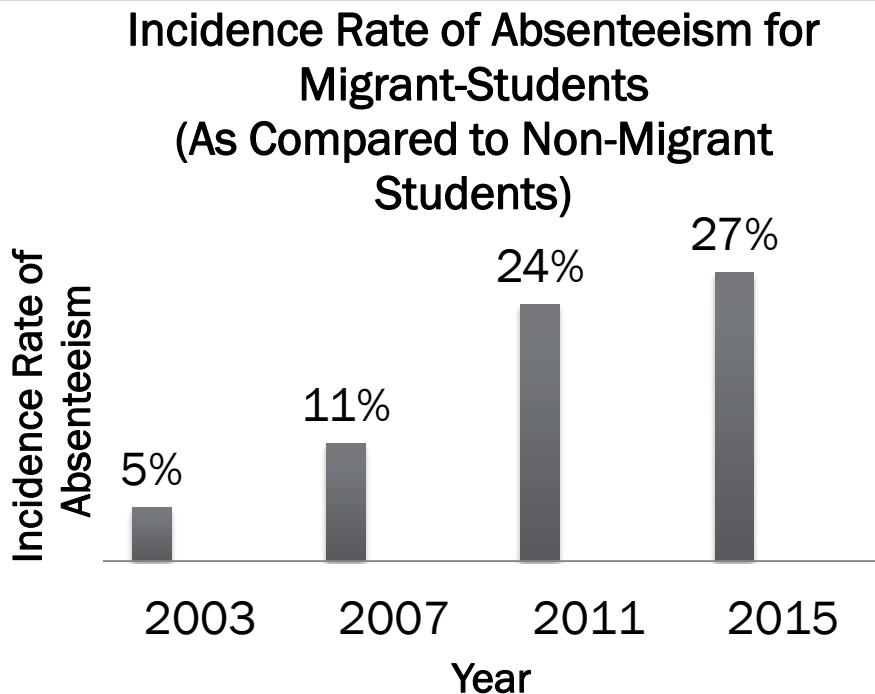
Intent-to-treat

TOTAL DAYS ABSENT AND CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Findings			
<u>Total Days Absent</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Migrant students	720696	8.91***	10.72
Non-Migrant Students	728951	7.47***	9.26
<u>Chronic Absenteeism</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Migrant students	728951	0.140***	0.35
Non-Migrant Students	30167843	0.09***	0.29

FINDINGS

- Latino MEP eligible students have up to **27% higher incidence rate** of absenteeism than Latino non-MEP students
- Latino MEP eligible students have up to **82% higher odds** of being chronically absent than Latino non-MEP students.



FINDINGS – PANEL DATA

Compares migrant students to themselves as they switch in and out of TMEP (128K students)

Conditional Fixed Effects: When migrant students are eligible (in TMEP) have **5%** higher odds of chronic absenteeism

ITT: An intent to treat analysis found that migrants participating in the TMEP had **6.7%** higher odds of chronic absenteeism

40% Sample

	<u>Mean - Total Days Absent</u>	<u>Mean – Chronic Absenteeism</u>
Migrant students who are always eligible for the MEP	9.2	0.15
Non-Migrant Students who are not switchers	7.4	0.09
Switcher Students who are MEP eligible	8.7	0.13
Switcher Students who are not MEP eligible	9.3	0.14

DISCUSSION

- ◆ Migrant students have higher odds and rates of chronic and total absenteeism
- ◆ Participation in the program is not able to lower odds of chronic absenteeism to the level of when students are ineligible for TMEP participation.
 - Why? Because eligible migrant students face the hardship of migration
- ◆ Access to and usage of the MEP does not correct for the disadvantage between migrant students and non-migrant students
- ◆ Texas MEP (TMEP) spent \$58M in 2014
 - (\$1600 / MEP student) => Not enough funding

STUDY 2: SCHOOL LEADERS

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In what ways are school leaders making sense of chronic absenteeism and its impact on students and families?

To what extent are school leaders thinking about migrant students as it relates to chronic absenteeism and daily attendance?

How can school leaders' understanding of chronic absence and migrant students inform future policies and practice?



METHODS

DATA COLLECTION

Semi-structured interviews with 40 school leaders in Texas

School leaders=Principals, APs, Superintendents, Asst. Superintendents

Number of School Leaders	Student Enrollment Range
8	1-999
6	1,000-4,999
9	5,000-14,999
17	15,000+

METHODS

DATA ANALYSIS

- Invivo coding of interview transcriptions for relevant themes
- Inter-rater reliability
- Triangulated with relevant documents provided by school leaders and district/school websites



**IN WHAT WAYS ARE SCHOOL
LEADERS MAKING SENSE OF
CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AND ITS
IMPACT ON STUDENTS AND
FAMILIES?**

Emergent Theme

TRYING TO UNDERSTAND CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

“Throughout my grad schooling we never talked about chronic absence. It was always about average daily attendance. So I am just now catching up on what chronic absenteeism is and what it means for students”

-Norman, Principal, FISD

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“Once they (U.S. DOE) made chronic absence an important indicator and something to report is when I first started seeing our district really try to wrestle with the idea that some of our students could be missing a lot more school than we previously thought. ”

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“It was not until our district joined a regional effort to combat chronic absenteeism that we were even thinking about chronic absence and its impact on students...”

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**TO WHAT EXTENT ARE SCHOOL
LEADERS THINKING ABOUT
MIGRANT STUDENTS AS IT
RELATES TO CHRONIC
ABSENTEEISM AND DAILY
ATTENDANCE?**

Emergent Theme

RESOURCES AND STRATEGIES

“In a district that has over 50% of its students identified as migrant, it is important to provide resources, training for our teachers, and improved efforts to make sure that while they are within our district for a period of time—that they are able to get to school daily and feel a part of this academic community”

-Anthony, Superintendent, AFISD

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“With a number of our students in the Migrant Education Program, we realized that if we don’t at least think about their daily attendance—then we could see a significant number of our students not succeeding academically. We should be doing everything as a district and community to support our migrant students—who are usually at the mercy of their families [parents] and the seasonal work”

-Anthony, Asst. Superintendent, DISD

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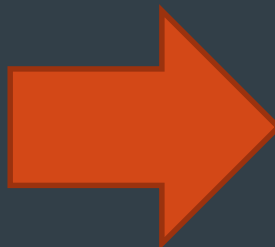
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**HOW CAN SCHOOL LEADERS'
UNDERSTANDING OF CHRONIC
ABSENCE AND MIGRANT
STUDENTS INFORM FUTURE
POLICIES AND PRACTICE?**

“It was through our learning that our migrant students were missing school for a variety of reasons that we decided to actually want to track the reasons why all our students were missing. So it is because we had a number of students who identified as migrant we created a system that where now, schools throughout the district can identify the reasons why a student might miss school...it has changed how we have tackled attendance and attendance issues”

-Celeste, Superintendent, AISD

Present



Absent

Absence

Reasons

Codes & Data

AISD

Topic	Reason Name	Reasons Description and Usage
Dental	Routine Dental Appointment	Went to dentist for reason other than pain/infection, such as cleaning, checkup, or cavity
Dental	Dental appointment to treat pain or infection	Went to dentist because of pain or infection
Military	Join military	Participating in activities necessary for joining military
Military	Military family visit	Visiting with parents or guardian who is on active duty in the armed forces

AISD

Topic	Reason Name	Reasons Description and Usage
Unexcused	School refusal/school avoidance	Refused to go to school, often because of anxiety about something at school; parent is usually aware of absence (if anxiety is not about school, code as mental health issue)
Unexcused	Skipping	Absent (and not on campus) for no particular reason, parent is usually unaware of absence
Unexcused	Truant	Absent from class but on campus (somewhere not allowed)
Unknown	Unwilling to provide detailed reason	For any AISD reason code triggering request for further detail, where student/family did not provide information needed for detailed reason code


AISD

Topic	Reason Name	Reasons Description and Usage
Family	Family responsibility (such caring for siblings)	Had family responsibility such as caring for younger siblings or elderly family members
Family	Funeral or family emergency	Attended a funeral or had a family emergency (do not need to know what family emergency is)
Family	Oversleeping/Family planning issue (not transportation)	Student or parent overslept or other issue where family not organized to get child to school
Family	Student's child ill	Illness of the student's child where the student has to provide care

AISD

Topic	Reason Name	Reasons Description and Usage	Treatment Follow Up
Medical	Acute illness	Usually contagious, short-lived, one-time illnesses such as cold, flu, sinus infection, stomach flu, strep throat, mono, etc.	Is your child going to the doctor for this? (Either has, already, or will go soon) If not, why not?
Medical	Asthma	Asthma or difficulty breathing	Is your child going to the doctor for this? (Either has, already, or will go soon) If not, why not?
Medical	Diabetes	Diabetes or diabetes complication (described as such by parent)	Is your child going to the doctor for this? (Either has, already, or will go soon) If not, why not?
Medical	Chronic illness	Any long term or regularly recurring physical condition other than diabetes or asthma, such as allergies, cedar fever, recurrent infections, autoimmune disease, etc.	Is your child going to the doctor for this? (Either has, already, or will go soon) If not, why not?

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- What do migrant students need to be not only successful at school but also attend school everyday?
 - Goes beyond just these students refusing to go to school or not wanting to be there (deficit perspective)
 - How can we prepare school leaders for an increase in migrant students, especially as the job market changes in the coming years?
 - How can our preparation programs improve course and experience offerings for school leaders?
 - What role does the community and collaborative efforts play in improving attendance? (Childs, 2017)
 - What other factors are present when it comes to missing school regularly? (Childs & Loftin, *Forthcoming*)
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THANK YOU

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