

## Teacher-Attendance Rates Vary Greatly Across Large Districts, Report Finds

By Stephen Sawchuk on June 3, 2014 7:38 AM

America's big-city districts have widely different teacher-attendance rates, with teachers in Cleveland absent more than twice the number of days as teachers in Indianapolis, for example.

That's [according to a new analysis](#) based on attendance data from 40 of the country's largest metropolitan areas. Overall, teachers in the districts were at school 94 percent of their scheduled hours in 2012-13. But that summary figure obscures many differences, including the worrisome fact that a minority of teachers—16 percent—are missing for days on end.

There's no clear explanation for such patterns, and policies to discourage absenteeism don't seem to have much effect, concludes the paper from the National Council on Teacher Quality, a Washington-based advocacy group.

For the study, the NCTQ broke out the absenteeism data by school poverty level. It examined only short-term absences, excluding from the sample long-term leave taken for serious illness or for maternity/paternity leave.

Here's a rundown of the most interesting findings:

- The average teacher was absent 11 days out of the school year.
- Teachers in Indianapolis; the District of Columbia; Louisville, Ky; Milwaukee; and Tampa, Fla., had the highest attendance rates (an average of fewer than nine days out). Teachers in Cleveland; Columbus, Ohio; Nashville, Tenn; Portland, Ore.; and Jacksonville, Fla., had the lowest attendance rates (about 14 or more days out).
- Nearly 16 percent of teachers are "chronically absent," or miss 18 or more days of school a year, and they account for more than a third of all absences. Another 16 percent of teachers missed just three or fewer days.
- In a subset of 25 districts with varied poverty levels, teachers in the highest-poverty schools were generally no more likely to be absent than those in schools with fewer disadvantaged students—a finding that conflicts with prior research.
- Districts' attendance rates didn't seem to differ based on whether or not they used incentives, such as payment for unused sick leave; giving bonuses for good attendance; or including attendance as an element in teachers' evaluations.
- Sick leave was the most common type of leave taken, followed by personal leave. Those two categories made up 71 percent of all absences, with professional leave (for attending conferences and the like) making up the difference.

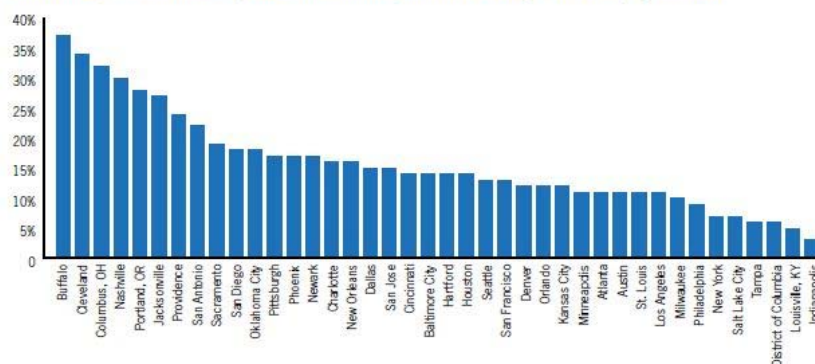
In all, the report raises more questions than answers on this thorny issue. But the overall absence rate should be a cause for concern, the NCTQ says.

"[Research](#) has shown a significant negative impact on student achievement in classrooms where the teacher is [absent for 10 days](#). Yet in the average classroom in this study, teachers exceed this level of absence, often for perfectly legitimate reasons and even in pursuit of becoming a more effective instructor," it says.

The American Federation of Teachers focused its comment on the report's overall finding.

"While some, no doubt, will find fault with teachers in this attendance report, an overall 94 percent attendance rate shows the extraordinary dedication of teachers across the country, who come to school each day ready and excited to teach," AFT President Randi Weingarten said in a statement. "This kind of stability is what our kids need to succeed."

Percentage of chronically absent teachers (absent 18 days or more) by district



Source: NCTQ