

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace
Relations**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates 2011-2012**

Outcome 2 - Schools and Youth

DEEWR Question No. EW1197_12

Senator Scullion asked on 16 February 2012, Hansard page 48

Question

School attendance

Senator SCULLION: In addition to that, Ms Paul, I asked about what we think is an attendance level. It is perhaps a fact that we do not have a national level of what we think is required in terms of attendance to be able to get an education. We have different schools deciding themselves. The Northern Territory government, in terms of their attendance benchmarks, seem to be pretty accurate in budgeting. They actually budget for only 33 per cent of Indigenous students attending more than 80 per cent. They are always on the money, because they only just fell short—they budgeted 32.1 per cent. While I am not saying that is the norm, sometimes people and organisations want to make themselves look as good as possible, so if you are setting indicators—these are critical performance indicators from the Northern Territory government—nobody wants to say, ‘Listen, we are breaching all of these people.’ I know that is human nature, but I think it would be of use and it would be useful if you could report back at the next set of estimates what they do internationally, what level of attendance is necessary to meet a minimum educational requirement. Ms Paul: What we might do is see whether we can find if there is any research on this question of a potential link between attendance levels and learning outcomes, which you put as getting a good education. I would put it in a more jargonny way of learning outcomes. The targets, for example, for attainment at year 12 level, for certain standards of literacy and numeracy and so on, tend to be more about the outcome itself not the means to the outcome. I remember when the target on achieving year 12 was set. There was actually debate in the education community about whether it should be attainment or just having done it—just retention, just having been there in year 12—and everyone went for attainment because you actually want to know not only that the child has been there but that they have actually done something, that they know something. My guess is—but we will take it on notice and have a look—that it is a bit like what Mr Cook was saying, that attendance is a bit fraught. Obviously, you would think the more you attend, the better you are going to do.

Answer

A range of international research has been undertaken regarding attendance and learning outcomes. The Australian Council for Education and Research internet site at <http://www.acer.edu.au> and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Closing the Gap Clearing House at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/> contain many international examples. Some publications are cited below but it should be noted that differing data methodologies make international comparisons difficult.

There is no consensus in the research as the minimum level of attendance that is required to achieve given education outcomes.

The strongest association between attendance and learning outcomes is the negative association between absence from school and measures of student achievement, whereby non-attendance and lower levels of school attendance lead to poor education outcomes; this in turn is related to an increased likelihood of welfare dependency, unemployment and in some cases involvement in the criminal justice system.

Research themes

Studies have found that many factors may affect the nature of the relationship between attendance and education outcomes. Themes from the research include:

<p>Student issues translating to poor exam results</p>	<p>Dreyfoos, Joy G. 1990. <i>Adolescents at Risk: Prevalence and Prevention</i>. New York: Oxford University Press.</p> <p>Finn, Jeremy D. 1993. <i>School Engagement and Students at Risk</i>, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.</p> <p>Gottfried, Michael, <i>The Detrimental Effect of Missing School</i>, American Journal of Education, v. 117, no. 2, Feb. 2011, p. 147-182.</p> <p>Lehr, Camilla A., Anastasia Hansen, Mary F. Sinclair, and Sandra L. Christenson. 2004. <i>Moving beyond Dropout Prevention to School Completion: An Integrative Review of Data Based Interventions</i>, School Psychology Review 32 (3): 342-64.</p> <p>Southamer-Loeber, Magda, and Rolf Loeber. 1988. <i>The Use of Prediction Data in Understanding Delinquency</i>, Behavioral Sciences and the Law 6 (3): 333-54.</p>
<p>Absence leading to alienation</p>	<p>Ekstrom, Ruth B., Margaret E. Goertz, Judith M. Pouak, and Donald A. Rock. 1986. <i>Who Drops Out of High School and Why? Findings from a National Study</i> Teachers College Record 87 (3): 356-73.</p> <p>Finn, Jeremy D. 1989. <i>Withdrawing from School</i>, Review of Educational Research 59 (2): 117-42.</p> <p>Johnson, Geneviève M. 2005. <i>Student Alienation, Academic Achievement, and WebCT Use</i>, Educational Technology and Society 8 (2): 179-89.</p> <p>Newmann, Fred. 1981. <i>Reducing Student Alienation in High Schools: Implications of Theory</i>, Harvard Educational Review 51 (4): 546-64.</p>
<p>Schools with lower patterns of attendance tend to experience lower</p>	<p>Caldas, Stephen J. 1993. <i>Re-examination of Input and Process Factor Effects in Public School Achievement</i>, Journal of Educational Research 86 (4): 206-14.</p> <p>Lamdin, Douglas J. 1996. <i>Evidence of Student Attendance as</i></p>

student performance on exams	<i>an Independent Variable in Education Production Functions</i> , Journal of Educational Research 89 (3): 155-62.
Success for students at risk via collaboration	<p>Gray J & Partington G 2003. <i>School attendance and non-attendance</i>. In: Beresford Q & Partington G (eds). Resistance and reform: Aboriginal youth and education. Perth: UWA Press. Malcolm et al. 2003)</p> <p>Nicholls B 2006. <i>Designing engaging curricula for at-risk students: Regional case-studies</i>. Paper presented at the Annual conference for the Australian Association for Research in Education, Adelaide, November.</p> <p>Nicholls B 2006. <i>Designing engaging curricula for at-risk students: Regional case-studies</i>. Paper presented at the Annual conference for the Australian Association for Research in Education, Adelaide, November.</p> <p>Patterson J 2006. <i>Whole of government action on young people's engagement and re-engagement with learning and earning: The SA experience of interagency collaboration</i>. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Adelaide, November.</p>
School attendance is a major influence on academic achievement	<p>Western Australian Auditor General's Report, <i>Every Day Counts: Managing student attendance in Western Australian Public Schools</i>, Report 9 – August 2009 at http://www.audit.wa.gov.au/reports/pdfreports/report2009_09.pdf</p> <p>Zubrick S, Silburn S, De Maio J, Shepherd C, Griffin J, Dalby R, Mitrou F, Lawrence D, Hayward C, Pearson, G, Milroy H, Milroy J & Cox A 2006. <i>The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: Improving the Educational Experiences of Aboriginal Children and Young People</i>. Perth: Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research.</p> <p>Zubrick S, Silburn S, Lawrence D, Mitrou F, Dalby R, Blair, E, Griffin J, Milroy H, De Maio JA, Cox A, & Li J 2005. <i>The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: The Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Children and Young People</i>. Perth: Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research. http://www.ichr.uwa.edu.au/waachs</p>
Early leavers	<p>Alexander, Karl L., Doris R. Entwisle, and Carrie S. Horsey 1997. <i>From First Grade Forward: Early Foundations of High School Dropout</i>, Sociology of Education 70 (2): 87-107.</p> <p>Gottfried, Michael A. 2009. <i>Excused versus Unexcused: How Student Absences in Elementary School Affect Academic Achievement</i>, Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis 31 (4): 392-415.</p> <p>Kane, Jean. 2006. <i>School Exclusions and Masculine, World-Class Identities</i>, Gender and Education 18 (6): 673-85.</p>

	<p>Neild, Ruth C, and Robert Bafianz. 2006. <i>An Extreme Degree of Difficulty: The Educational Demographics of Urban Neighborhood Schools</i>, Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk 11 (2): 1231.</p> <p>Rumberger, Russell W. 1995. <i>Dropping out of Middle School: A Multilevel Analysis of Students and Schools</i>, American Education Research Journal 32 (3): 583-625.</p> <p>Rumberger, Russell W, and Scott L. Thomas. 2000. <i>The Distribution of Dropout and Turnover Rates among Urban and Suburban High Schools</i>, Sociology of Education 73 (1): 39-67.</p>
Quality teaching is the key	<p><i>Teachers Make a Difference, What is the research evidence?</i> John Hattie, University of Auckland, Australian Council for Educational Research, October 2003</p> <p>Ken Rowe, <i>The Importance of Teacher Quality as a Key Determinant of Students' Experiences and Outcomes of Schooling</i>, PhD October 2003</p>
Literature reviews	<p>Purdie, Nola and Buckely, Sarah, <i>School attendance and retention of Indigenous Australian students – Issues Paper No 1</i>, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, September 2010 http://www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/documents/issues_paper_s/ctg-ip01.pdf</p> <p>Wheatley S & Spillane G 2001. <i>Home and away: A literature review of school absenteeism and nonengagement issues</i>, Victoria: Victorian State-wide School Attachment and Engagement Planning and Interest Group. http://www.sfys.infoxchange.net.au/resources/public/items/2006/11/00014-upload-00001.pdf</p>