



March 3, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

This testimony is submitted on behalf of The Children's Aid Society, a non-profit organization based in New York City. Founded in 1853, The Children's Aid Society helps children in poverty to succeed and thrive. We do this by providing comprehensive supports to children and their families in targeted high-needs New York City neighborhoods. The National Center for Community Schools is part of The Children's Aid Society. The role of the National Center is to build the capacity of schools, districts, community partners and government agencies to organize their human and financial resources around student success. Since 1994, we have provided training, consultation and other forms of technical assistance to nearly all of the major national and international community school initiatives. We have provided technical assistance to many schools throughout Connecticut, as well as to the Connecticut State Department of Education.

The Children's Aid Society National Center for Community Schools supports Raised Bill No. 5357 to require schools and districts to track chronic absenteeism, and to institute Student Attendance Review Teams. We support this bill with a proposed revision to the definition of "chronic absenteeism." As defined by Attendance Works, one of the leading national entities in this work, as well as the definition that we use in New York City and in the work we do across the country, the term "chronic absenteeism" is meant to encompass both unexcused AND excused absence. The reason we choose to define Chronic Absenteeism in this way is that if a student misses school, he or she misses a learning opportunity; excused or not. Students need to be in school to learn.

Secondly, regarding the Student Attendance Review Teams, we feel that you should consider placing a Parent Coordinator or Community Liaison on the team. It is very helpful to have this person provide input into the review, as this person is often very knowledgeable regarding the students and families that the school serves.

Four years ago in New York City, The Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism and School Engagement was created. The focus of this Task Force was to identify students in schools with high rates of chronic absenteeism, and to help schools learn how to better serve these students and families. Until this point, schools only looked at their average daily attendance. While doing so is important, doing this alone disregards a large group of students and the individual issues preventing them from attending school regularly. One way of addressing these needs was to provide "Success Mentors" to the identified students.



The Children's Aid Society National Center for Community Schools

475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1220, New York, NY 10115 ♦ t: 212-569-2866 f: 212-663-1259 ♦ www.nationalcenterforcommunityschools.org

Consultation ♦ Advocacy ♦ Innovation

Dr. Robert Balfanz from the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University performed an independent evaluation of the program, and identified key action steps for cities to execute to reduce chronic absenteeism. Through this work over the past 4 years, we were able to achieve the following results as identified by the Balfanz evaluation:

- Students with prior histories of chronic absenteeism with a Success Mentor gained nearly two additional weeks of school (9 days), which is educationally significant.
- In the top 25% of schools, students with Success Mentors gained one additional month of school.
- High School students with Success Mentors (including those overage for their grade) were 52% more likely to remain in school the following year.
- Mentees reported they liked having a mentor and the mentor helped improve their attendance, schoolwork, motivation, and confidence.

The Children's Aid Society National Center for Community Schools is very much in support of this work and of Bill 5357, and we thank you for accepting this testimony. We have changed the lives of tens of thousands of students over the past four years through our focus on Chronic Absenteeism. If you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Lukas Weinstein
Director of Special Projects
The Children's Aid Society National Center for Community Schools