

TEACHER ABSENTEEISM

Teacher absenteeism is considered a major obstacle in achieving the goals of universalisation of elementary education (UEE). It is realized that a primary school in a remote village with a non-resident parents and children fail to relate to such an institution leading to a high dropout rate.

School is a fundamental educational establishment where practical educational activities are carried out systematically. Although in most cases teachers work alone in classrooms, they are members of a group, which works together to develop what could be called a school culture. We can hardly expect high-quality school education without good leadership on the part of the headmaster and active co-operation of teachers in school management.

Quality of learning in the classroom has to be ensured with the total involvement of teachers administrative structures and intervention can only be supportive and facilitative. In order to provide education of satisfactory quality an important requirement is that teachers teach whatever they are supposed to teach and students remain in the class when teaching is going on. If teachers are not present on all the working days and no teaching takes place because of the absence of teachers, either the prescribed course of any given class will not be completed or will be completed in unsatisfactory manner. Thus teacher absence affects the quality of education.

The meaning of the term quality of education depends upon the perspective one holds or the conceptual framework one uses to define what education is.

A Report to UNESCO: Education throughout life as based upon four pillars:

- Learning to know acknowledges that learners build their own knowledge daily, combining indigenous and 'external' elements.
- Learning to do focuses on the practical application of what is learned.
- Learning to live together addresses the critical skills for a life free from discrimination, where all have equal opportunity to develop themselves, their families and their communities.
- Learning to be emphasizes the skills needed for individuals to develop their full potential.

Excessive absences lead to a loss of productivity. In education, absenteeism means a loss in student learning, which can't be made up in overtime. Every time teacher absenteeism reports play out in the news, teacher leave turns into a tug-of-war between those who claim that the issue is overblown — or point fingers at any number of causes — and those who are determined that "something must be done about these absences!"

There's no question there are significant costs involved: both student learning and the district's budget take a hit every time a teacher is out of the classroom. In fact, teacher absenteeism costs much every year. But it is, to some extent, unavoidable. Like employees in any organization, teachers will be absent during the school year — it's only a matter of why they're out, how often, and who fills in for them.

What Factors Influence Teacher Absenteeism?

There are always two sides of every story: let's take a look at each.

- **Contractually-Guaranteed Paid Time Off**

Teachers are provided with a set amount of time off — often 12 days or more — guaranteed by their contracts. Having so many days of leave can encourage teachers to be absent often enough to impact student achievement.

If teachers are given a benefit, such as paid time off, it seems counterintuitive to then rebuke them for taking it. Employees in other fields are allowed to use their paid time off, so teachers should be able to as well.

- **Professional Development**

According to a report from Frontline Research & Learning Institute, nearly 1 in 5 absences are for professional reasons – and half of those are solely due to professional development. Moving professional development to evenings or in-service days keeps teachers in the classroom and in front of students.

Holding PD outside of school hours can be prohibitively expensive. And teachers already work long hours — additional demands for their time may be met with resistance.

- **Job-Related Stress**

Some believe that teacher contracts should allow for much less time off in the first place. After all, they claim, teachers have the summer off and many schools are closed during the holiday season. The average teacher teaches for 8 hours, helps students before or after school for another hour, and spends another 3-5 hours on administrative tasks such as grading, planning and meetings. A large portion of the summer is spent on PD and planning the curriculum. It's not unreasonable to think that all of that stress could lead to teachers burning out and needing to take a mental health day. And since we know that high stress levels weaken the immune system, it's possible that overworked educators could just be falling ill more often — especially when sick students come to school.

- **Maternity Leave and Children**

Teaching is a traditionally female occupation, and maternity leave can account for many absences. Women are also often the ones to take off from work when their own children are sick and need to stay home. Maternity leave is protected under federal labor regulations and is bound to cause absences in any occupation. No employees, teachers included, should be expected to put work before their family. And it's worth noting that when analyzing teacher absence data, maternity leave absences are often intentionally excluded. But, that doesn't account for absences taken to care for sickly children.