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**NATIONAL COUNCIL ON TEACHER QUALITY RELEASES
STUDY FINDING THAT TEACHERS ARE IN SCHOOL 94
PERCENT ON AVERAGE, BUT RATE IS DRAGGED DOWN BY
MINORITY OF TEACHERS WHO ARE ABSENT 18 DAYS OR
MORE**

*Districts in 40 of the Country's Largest Cities Encouraged to Improve Attendance
by Focusing on Chronically Absent Teachers*

June 3, 2014 – A study looking at the attendance of over 234,000 teachers in the 2012-2013 school year found disturbing evidence of a group of teachers who are absent at least one out of every ten school days. The report, *Roll Call: The importance of teacher attendance*, finds that at 16 percent, the group of chronically absent teachers was precisely equivalent in size to the group of teachers who had excellent attendance in that school year, absent three or fewer days.

The findings were especially troubling because the study excluded long term absences of 11 or more days in order to ensure that any teacher who had to take extended leave for illness or family problem were not part of the sample. The results only include absences of one to ten consecutive days.

“While these big city school districts are struggling to improve student achievement, they may be overlooking one of the most basic aspects of teacher effectiveness: every teacher being regularly on the job, teaching kids,” commented Kate Walsh, President of the National Council on Teacher Quality, a research and policy organization dedicated to ensuring every classroom is led by a quality teacher.

The report categorizes teachers' attendance rates into four categories: excellent attendance (≤ 3 days); moderate attendance (4-10 days); frequent absenteeism (11-17 days) and chronic absenteeism (18 days or more). Among the report's main findings:

- On average, teachers missed 11 days out of a 186-day school year (the average school year length) for any reason, typically illness, illness of a family member, personal business or professional development. On average these



districts offered a leave package of 13 days, intended for illness or personal reasons.

- The largest group was those with moderate attendance (40%) followed by those with frequent absenteeism (28%).
- In spite of previous research to the contrary, no relationship was found between teacher absences and the poverty levels of the children in the school building. More affluent schools were just as likely to have high rates of absences as less affluent schools.
- Indianapolis teachers had the lowest number of days missed of the 40 districts (6 days), followed by teachers working in the District of Columbia, Louisville (KY), Milwaukee, Tampa, New York and Philadelphia also had low average numbers of absences per teacher per year, all ranging from 7 to 9 days on average.
- Cleveland had the highest number of days missed on average (16 days), but Columbus (OH) (15 days), Nashville, Portland (OR) and Jacksonville (FL), were not far behind (all 14 days).

A sizeable percentage of the absences were for reasons classified as "district authorized" leave, which most often means professional development such as training on new curriculum adoptions or intervention strategies but also includes other absences that could include meetings held during the school day that require teachers to be in attendance, like union negotiations. Walsh stated, "While professional development can be valuable, districts should avoid at all costs cutting into precious classroom time. Even 'good' absences have bad consequences for kids."

Although three quarters of the districts had policies to suppress absenteeism – typically strategies like requiring a doctor's note after missing a certain number of days – there did not appear to be any impact on attendance rates. Districts without such policies had equivalent absenteeism. Walsh added, "We have learned that it is not so much district policy but expectations which lead to high attendance. Teachers who work in buildings that are led by principals with high standards are much less likely to be absent."

The full report is available [here](#).

Methodology

NCTQ requested teacher attendance data for school year 2012-2013 (the most recent year for which such data is available) from 51 public school districts from the largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. Forty of the 51 districts responded to



the data request with enough information to be included in the report. NCTQ calculated the average teacher attendance rates and the average number of days teachers were absent, categorized teachers into one of four attendance categories, and examined the data for differences between schools with varying poverty levels and between districts with varying attendance incentives. Long-term absences (absences of more than 10 consecutive days) were not included in the analysis.

About the National Council on Teacher Quality

The National Council on Teacher Quality advocates for reforms in a broad range of teacher policies at the federal, state, and local levels in order to increase the number of effective teachers. In particular, we recognize the absence of much of the evidence necessary to make a compelling case for change and seek to fill that void with a research agenda that has direct and practical implications for policy. We are committed to lending transparency and increasing public awareness about the four sets of institutions that have the greatest impact on teacher quality: states, teacher preparation programs, school districts and teachers unions. For more information, visit: www.nctq.org.